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INDIA TODAY

MOOD OF THE NATION POLL

IN MODI WE TRUST...

THE BIANNUAL SURVEY REVEALS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER IS STILL REGARDED AS THE BEST BET FOR THE JOB, BUT SERIOUS CONCERNS REMAIN

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FROM THE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Public opinion is fundamental to democracy because, ultimately, a state is built on the consent of its people. That said, public opinion is not static. Politicians elected by the will of the people can rest on their laurels only at their peril. Sooner or later, the chickens come home to roost. Smart politicians keep track of their electorate's changing sentiment, whatever means they employ for it. Opinion polls, rigorously conducted, are one instrument many countries use, and take seriously. INDIA TODAY has always believed such surveys to be the most scientific and objective way to gauge the public mood. They may not always be right in predicting the number of seats in an election, but they capture the views of more people than any individual can hope to do.

We began the INDIA TODAY Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll in 2003 to assess people's perception of personalities and popular issues. Conducted biannually, once before Republic Day, and then on the eve of Independence Day, it has since become a reliable dipstick of Indian public opinion. As the MOTN exercise enters its second decade, we have refined our methodology and increased our sample size. For one, we have onboarded a new independent polling agency, CVoter. Our January 2022 MOTN poll interviews 60,141 respondents—more than five times our usual sample size. CVoter has also been keeping a daily tracker since 2019 with a sample size of 1,200 and has been in the polling business since 2000.

August 23, 2021

Our survey comes at an interesting time. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is halfway through its second term in office. A midterm assessment is a key measure of a government's popularity, particularly in extraordinary times such as these when three waves of the Covid-19 pandemic over two years have upended the economy, destroyed lives and damaged livelihoods. A lethal second wave spurred by the highly infectious Delta variant claimed over 400,000 lives last year and left long-term health and financial implications for thousands more. Currently, the country is in the grip of a third Covid wave, triggered by the Omicron strain. While regarded as a milder variant, it has clouded the gradual economic recovery that began in the second quarter of the financial year, as business activity inched up to pre-Covid levels.

The urban unemployment rate rose to 9.3 per cent, and rural employment to 7.3 per cent in December 2021, from 8.2 per cent and 6.4 per cent the previous month, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data. CMIE estimates six million salaried jobs were lost in November 2021. India's benchmark inflation rate, measured by the Consumer Price Index, was 5.6 per cent in December 2021, the highest in five months. Adding to these economic woes is the Chinese military buildup in eastern Ladakh, a standoff that has lasted nearly two years, with no resolution in sight.

The real worry for respondents this time, as in the previous MOTN survey, is the state of the economy. As many as 48 per cent cite unemployment and prices as their major concerns. The number of people who believe their economic status has deteriorated remains high at 31.8 per cent, somewhat similar to the August 2021 findings, but it has doubled from January 2021. This implies that the government has not addressed economic issues adequately. Worse, another 42.7 per cent think the government's economic policies have helped only big business.

As counterintuitive as it may seem, Prime Minister Modi and his government seem to have held a steady course in public perception. If general elections were held today, MOTN projects that the BJP will fall just one seat short of a simple majority (272 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha) but win 296 seats as part of the NDA. The dip from the BJP and NDA's current tallies—303 and 352 seats—can be attributed to the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic and possibly the mid-term fatigue most governments face. However, 58.7 per cent feel very satisfied/satisfied by the government's overall performance.

No wonder Prime Minister Modi's personal popularity is rising. From an all-time MOTN low of 54 per cent last August, it has climbed back to 62 per cent, though it is still lower than the 78 per cent in August 2020. In the best choice for PM stakes, Modi has widened the gap with his nearest political competitor, Rahul Gandhi—52.5 per cent versus 6.8 per cent. He is, in fact, adjudged the best prime minister India has had, head and shoulders above even his late mentor, A.B. Vajpayee, who is a distant second. Nearly 53 per cent of respondents dismiss the opposition parties' attempts to hold the government to account.

The latest MOTN makes it clear that despite all their concerns, respondents trust Modi to lead them out of their troubles. A larger than life figure in today's political landscape, the faith and trust in him has been a constant in our surveys since his election in 2014, despite the challenges the country has faced. Hence, our headline for the cover this week, 'In Modi We Trust'.

India's successful vaccination campaign has come as a booster dose for Modi and his government's standing. India has so far administered 1.5 billion doses. Currently, 97 per cent of the country's adult population has received the first dose of the vaccine and 70 per cent have received both doses. An overwhelming 82 per cent believe the vaccination drive has been a success; 49 per cent deem the government's efforts outstanding.

Respondents have also endorsed the government's stance on its two biggest external challenges, China and Pakistan. Seventy five per cent feel the Centre has handled the border standoff with China very well or satisfactorily. Over 55 per cent do not want the government to resume talks with Pakistan.

However, public concerns on the current state of Indian democracy, however, remain high—43.7 per cent suggest democracy is in danger, up from 42 per cent last August; 48.9 per cent believe people are scared to protest or express themselves on public platforms for fear of arrest. This is a marginal dip from the 51 per cent who felt this in August 2021. Privacy is an overwhelming concern for 56.4 per cent of digital media users. These are fundamental issues to be addressed for India to be a robust democracy.

The big takeaway from our present survey is that while the public trusts Prime Minister Modi's leadership and his political capital remains intact, he needs to deliver on the economic front and fulfill the high expectations people have of him.

(Aroon Purie)

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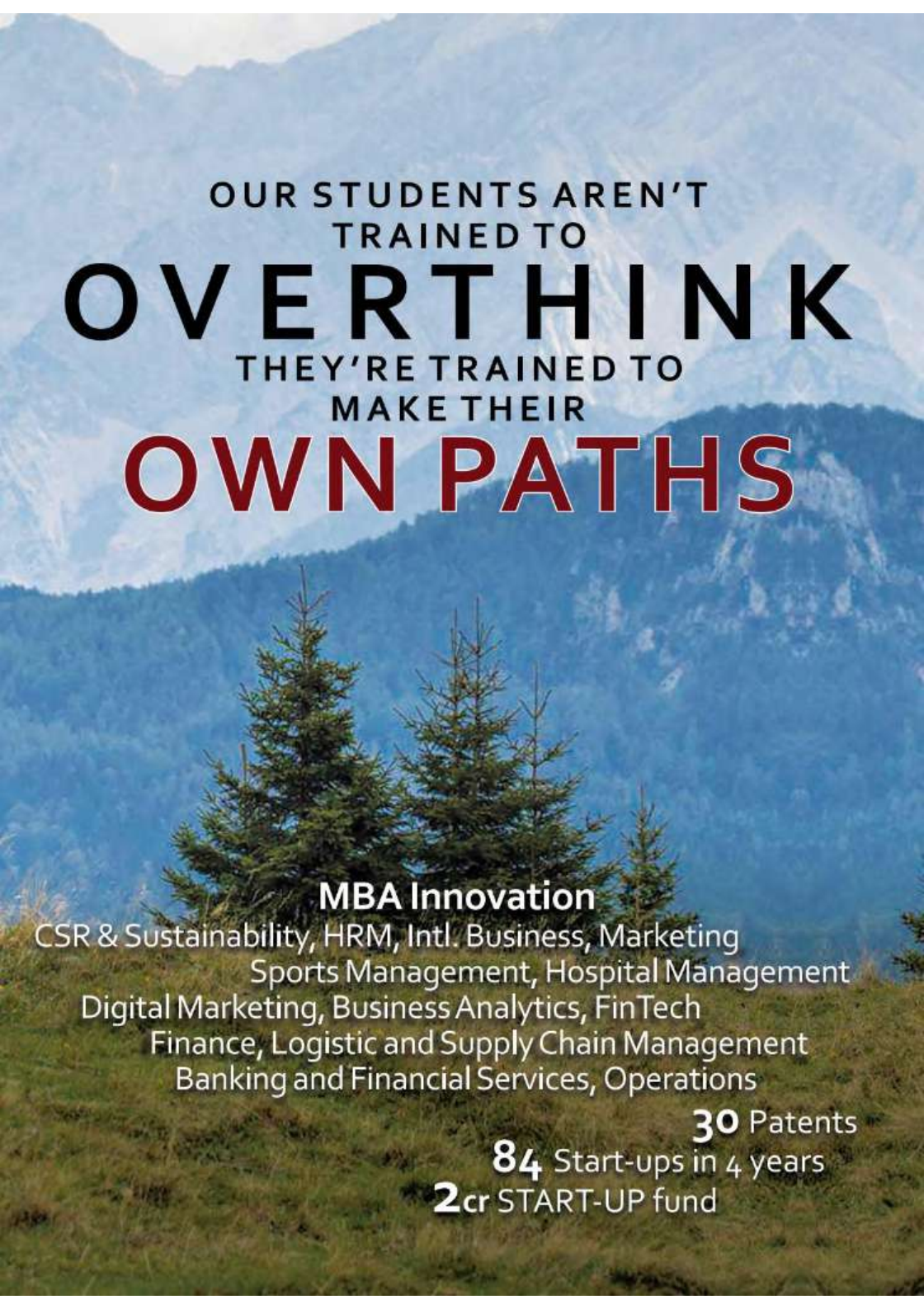
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SANJAY KANOJIA/AFP

MOOD OF THE NATION

COVER STORY

IN MODI WE TRUST...

but the rising unemployment and inflation are besmirching the sheen on the prime minister and his government's achievements

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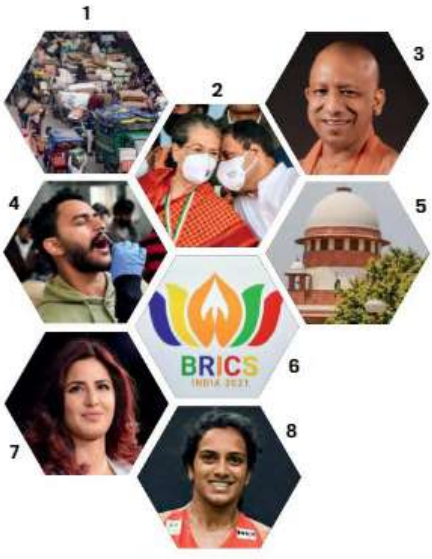

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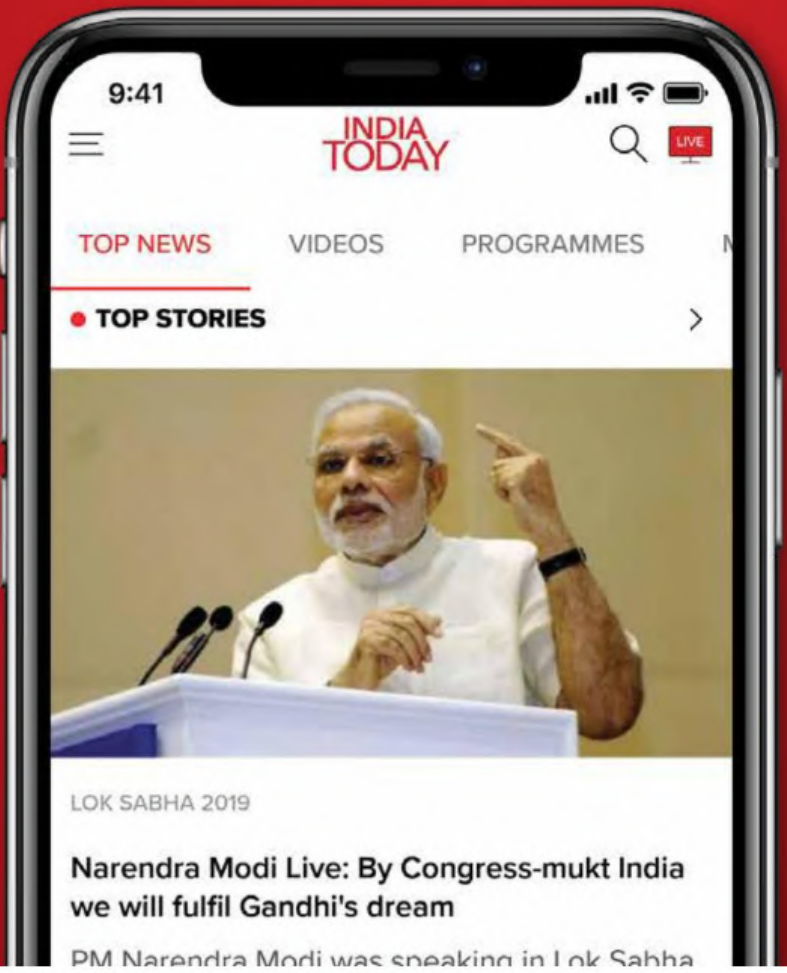

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IN MODI WE TRUST...

THE BIANNUAL SURVEY REVEALS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER IS STILL REGARDED AS THE BEST BET FOR THE JOB, BUT SERIOUS CONCERNS REMAIN

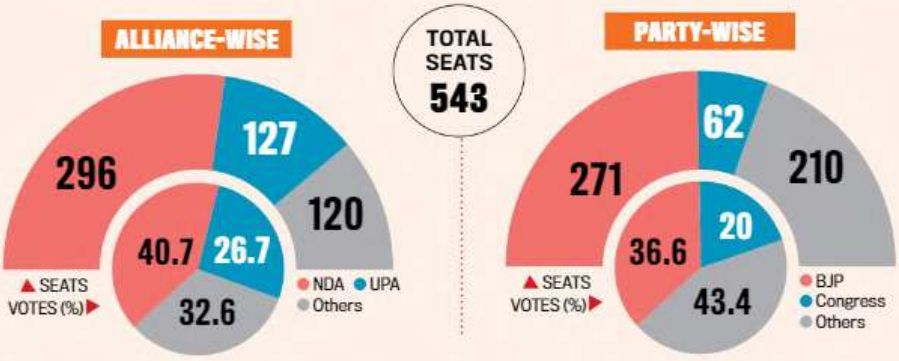
By **RAJ CHENGAPPA**

"There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things," Niccolò Machiavelli wrote in his treatise *The Prince*. Midway through his second term as prime minister, Narendra Modi must make a decisive shift in priorities to lift the nation out of the economic morass it has sunk into, and set it firmly on the path to prosperity. He must also use the remaining years of his term to become the great unifier of the country—to achieve the kind of new order that Machiavelli was referring too.

These are the two key takeaways emerging from the January 2022 edition of the INDIA TODAY-CVoter biannual Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll, with respondents reiterating their belief that Narendra Modi remains the best bet for the job. That faith stems from the way the prime minister has so far handled the triad of crises before the nation—the unprecedented and prolonged Covid pandemic, an economy in a shambles and a dangerous border confrontation with China.

INDIA TODAY MOOD OF THE NATION POLL 2022

PROJECTED RESULTS IF LS ELECTIONS WERE HELD TODAY



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OTHERS: Aam Aadmi Party, All India Forward Bloc, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, All India TrinamoolCongress, All Jharkhand Students Union, Amma Makkal Munnettra Kazagam, Biju Janata Dal, Bahujan Samaj Party, Bodoland People's Front, Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Gondwana Gantantra Party, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, Indian National Lok Dal, Janta Congress Chhattisgarh, Janata Dal (Secular) Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party, Kerala Congress (Mani), Makkal Nidhee Maiam, Rashtriya Lok Dal, Rashtriya Lok Samta Party, Shiromani Akali Dal, Sikkim Democratic Party, Samajwadi Party, Telegu Desam Party, Telangana Rasthra Samithi, YSR Congress Party, Independents and Others

Modi's personal popularity sees an uptick this MOTN, with 62.8 per cent of respondents rating his performance as good to outstanding, compared to 54 per cent in August 2021. This is still some distance from the phenomenal 78 per cent approval that the prime minister garnered in August 2020, at the peak of the first wave of Covid. However, it does not diminish their trust in Modi's ability to deliver.

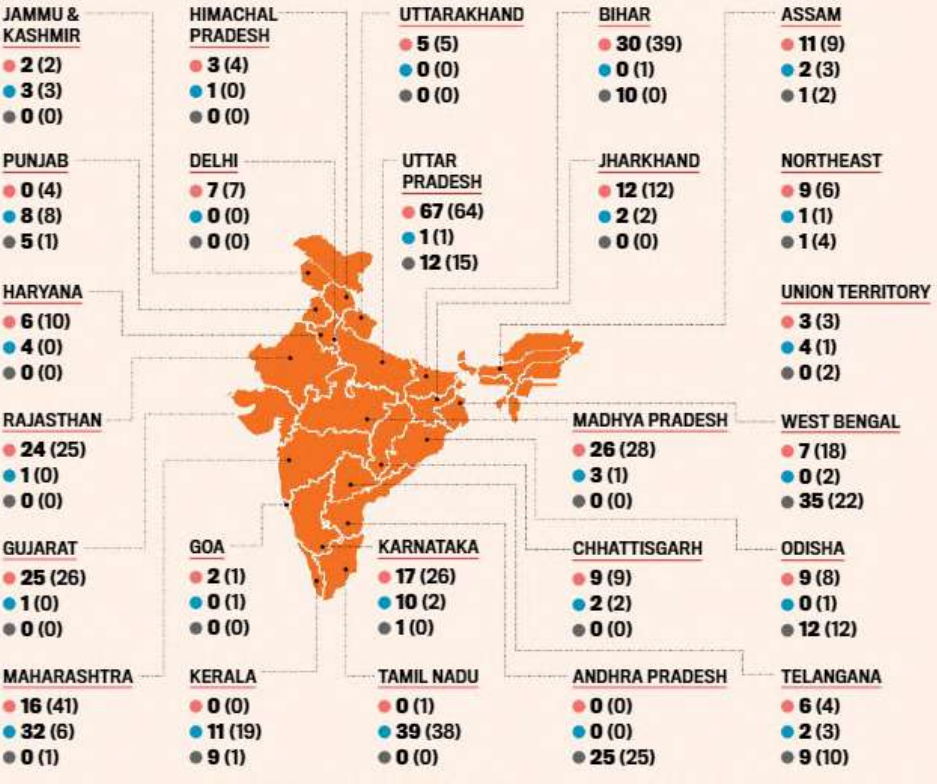
The widening chasm between his popularity and that of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, his closest contender from the Opposition, only reinforces the notion. Asked who is best suited to be the next prime minister, 52.5 per cent respondents voted for Modi and only 6.8 per cent for Rahul—a yawning gap of 46 per cent. In August 2021, that gap had narrowed to 14 per cent, with Modi polling 24 per cent and Rahul 10 per cent. The ratings for the NDA government's performance too have improved, with 58.7 per cent saying they were satisfied or very satisfied compared to 53 per cent in August 2021.

56
LOSS OF SEATS PROJECTED FOR THE NDA SHOULD LS POLLS BE HELD TODAY, FROM 352 IT WON IN 2019

What explains this booster dose of confidence for Modi and his government? One clear reason seems to be the massive Covid vaccination drive that crossed over 1.64 billion doses on January 18, with more than 70 per cent of India's 940 million adult population now fully vaccinated. That has fostered a sense of security in the face of the pandemic in addition to saving lives and livelihoods.

It is this endorsement that the MOTN reflects when it lists the NDA government's

STATE-WISE BREAK-UP OF SEATS



handling of the Covid pandemic as its single biggest achievement. This is followed by the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya (15.7 per cent) and the revocation of Article 370 in Kashmir (12 per cent). This is in sharp contrast to the August 2021 MOTN edition where the government's handling of Covid was billed as one of its biggest failures at a time the second wave was raging.

Drawing lessons from that setback, Modi seems to have moved proactively on the threat posed by Omicron, the recent Covid variant driving the third wave. The prime minister announced booster doses for vulnerable adults above 60 years and introduced vaccinations for the 15 to 18-year age group. Modi also convened a video conference of all chief ministers, advising them to gear up for the challenge and ramp up testing facilities, ensure adequate beds with oxygen supply and critical care equipment.

46%

THE **YAWNING GAP IN MODI AND RAHUL'S POPULARITY**, COMPARED TO 14% IN AUG. 2021

However, the support that Modi and the NDA government have received this MOTN comes with caveats. Rising prices and unemployment have been listed as the government's two biggest failures. Add demonetisation to the list, and as many as 44 per cent point to economic issues as this government's biggest let-downs. However, the government may find some comfort in the fact that a majority—51.9 per cent—still believes it has handled the economy well.

Yet other sobering indicators should dispel any complacency on this front. As many as 64 per cent believe that their economic status has either remained the same or wors-

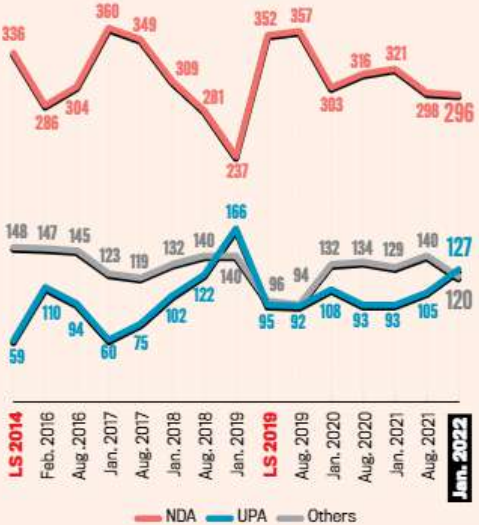
Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

SWING IN THE PUBLIC MOOD

How seat and vote share projections have changed since NDA came to power

SEATS

ALLIANCE-WISE



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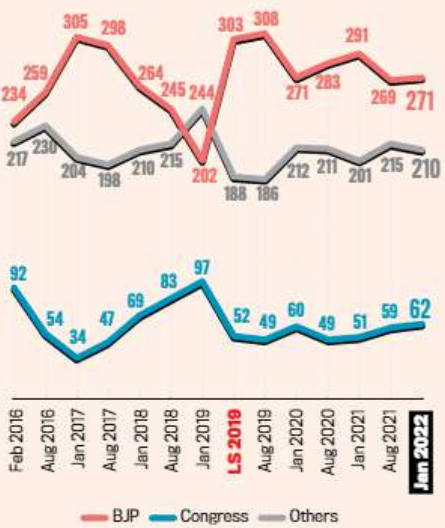
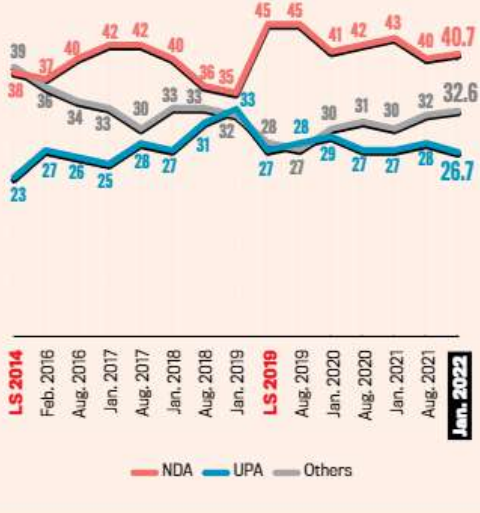


VOTE SHARE (%)

ALLIANCE-WISE



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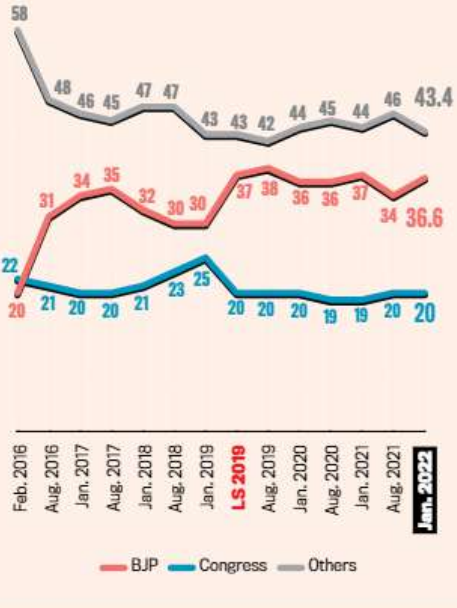


ened since Modi took charge in 2014 and 51 per cent don't expect the situation to get better in the next six months. Moreover, more than half of those surveyed expect their household income to stagnate or even worsen, with 64 per cent indicating that their income had declined because of Covid-19. Some 45 per cent also described the shortage of jobs as an extremely serious problem. These should be red flags for the Modi government.

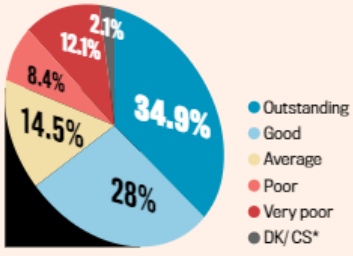
The poll findings also explain why despite the higher rating in overall performance of both the prime minister and his government, as compared to the previous poll, their position in terms of a majority in the 543-member Lok Sabha remains tenuous when compared to their big win in 2019. While there is no immediate danger to the stability of the government, if an election was held now, the NDA would be down to 296 seats from the actual 352 it won in May 2019—a loss of 56 seats. For the second consecutive MOTN survey, the ruling BJP shows a drop of over 30 seats, with its individual tally down to 271 seats—one short of a majority—compared to the 303 seats it actually won in the 2019 election. The Congress party has gained, but not by much, adding only 10 seats to its tally of 52 in 2019.

The situation could have been far worse for the BJP had the Congress position in the key states where it won assembly elections in 2018—Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh—not weakened considerably. The current MOTN survey suggests that the BJP would win a majority in these states today, as it did in 2019. Even in Gujarat, where the Congress put up a good fight in the 2017 assembly poll, it is unlikely to make any gains in parliamentary polls as things stand, thanks to subsequent infighting in the party. Conversely, the BJP will have to rely on winning these four states along with a big sweep in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to retain its majority. The MOTN poll shows that the BJP's major push for seats in the east and the south have not borne as much fruit. The party suffered a grievous defeat in the West Bengal state election last year and, in Odisha, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik remains invincible. The BJP's position in Karnataka remains fragile while in Telangana, the BJP is unlikely to unseat the K. Chandrashekar Rao government despite making big strides. Nor has it been able to shake the hold of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi coalition in Maharashtra.

However, while Modi's charisma may be yielding diminishing returns in recent state elections, he continues to be the BJP's

WHILE BENEFICIARIES MAY LAUD THE PM FOR HIS MANY WELFARE SCHEMES, THEY WOULD RATHER HAVE **SECURE EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME THAN LIVE ON GOVT DOLES**

Q. HOW DO YOU RATE THE PERFORMANCE OF NARENDRA MODI AS PRIME MINISTER?



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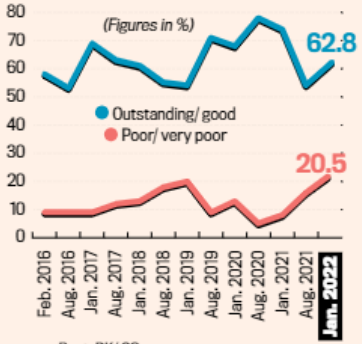
MODI'S PERFORMANCE OVER THE YEARS



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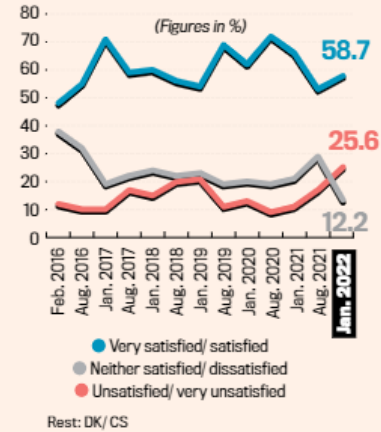
Q. HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE NDA GOVERNMENT?



Rest: DK/ CS

trump card for re-election in 2024. The MOTN results show that while Mamata Banerjee, Arvind Kejriwal and Rahul Gandhi—in that order—are seen as best suited to lead an Opposition alliance, their popular appeal lags way behind Modi's. That's because the Opposition has so far been unable to build a convincing narrative against the Modi government's performance, or to give the electorate a cohesive, alternative vision of governance. In fact, the survey shows that Modi is now considered by far the best prime minister India has had, way ahead of Indira Gandhi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee or Jawaharlal Nehru.

Interestingly, when asked who is best suited to succeed Modi as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate, the survey, for the first time, throws up a dead heat between the Union home minister Amit Shah and Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath. The gap had started narrowing in the previous MOTN. If the BJP wins the upcoming poll in UP, then the scales may tilt further in favour of Adityanath. The UP chief minister's rise may be because he is seen as more of a Hindutva hardliner—much as Modi was prior to 2014. It was in the run-up to 2014 that Modi overtook L.K. Advani as the most prominent hardliner and emerged as the prime BJP contender for the post of prime minister.

While these may be battles of perception, there is little doubt that the Modi-Shah duo cemented its Hindutva credentials at the beginning of the NDA's second term. They moved swiftly to dilute Article 370 (a move in which Shah took the lead) and, after the Supreme Court verdict in the Ayodhya dispute ruling in favour of building a Ram temple in Ayodhya, put its construction on the fast track. Both these actions continue to be regarded as the Modi government's top achievements, ensuring that the BJP retains its core Hindutva vote.

Overall, the MOTN results are a mixed bag for Modi and his government.

Q. WHO HAS BEEN INDIA'S BEST PRIME MINISTER SO FAR?

Narendra Modi 34%

Atal Bihari Vajpayee 20.3%

Indira Gandhi 10.8%

Jawaharlal Nehru 8.8%

Manmohan Singh 6.8%

Lal Bahadur Shastri 5%

V.P. Singh 4.5%

Rajiv Gandhi 2.6%

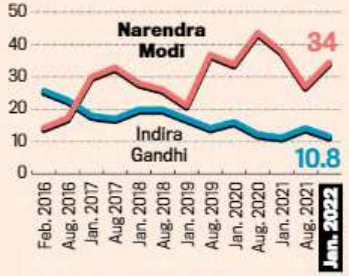
P.V. Narasimha Rao 1.8%

Morarji Desai 1.4%

Note: Rest DK/ CS (Don't know/ can't say) and Others

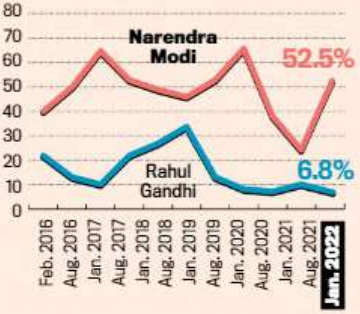
NARENDRA MODI VS. INDIRA GANDHI

How the MOTN surveys reflected the popularity trends of two Indian prime ministers known for radical moves



NARENDRA MODI VS. RAHUL GANDHI

How the MOTN surveys have captured public mood on the choice of prime ministerial candidate between the leaders of the two national parties

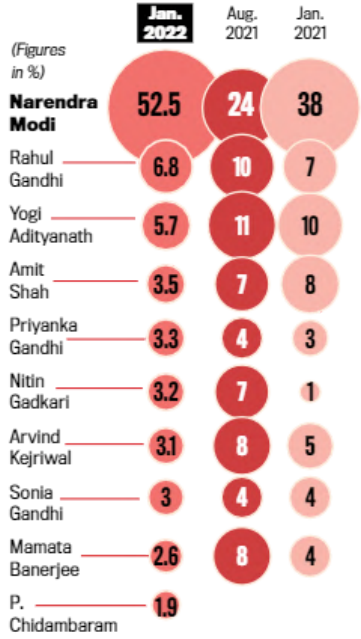


Q. WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT OF THE NDA GOVERNMENT?

(Figures in %)	Jan. 2022	Aug. 2021	Jan. 2021	Aug. 2020
Handling of the Covid-19 pandemic	22.2	12	15	7
Rebuilding of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and Kashi Viswanath Corridor	15.7	29	27	13
Revocation of Article 370 in Kashmir	12	22	20	16
Welfare schemes such as Swachh Bharat Mission, Ujjwala Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission and Jan Dhan Yojana	8.4			
Corruption-free governance	6.7	5	5	9
Crackdown on black money through demonetisation	6.3	8	8	6
Make in India initiative	2.8	8	9	2
Others	15.7	8	8	1

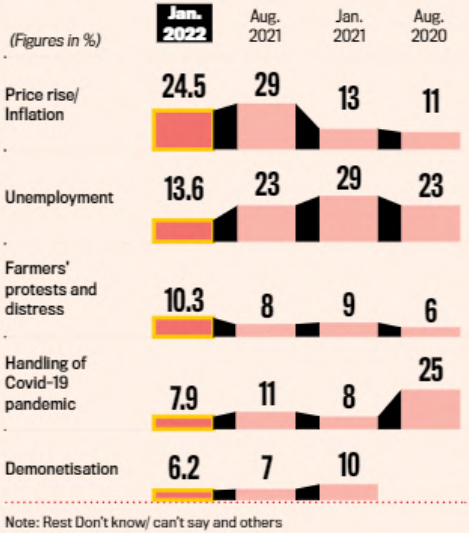
Note: Rest DK/ CS (Don't know/ can't say) and others

Q. WHO IS BEST SUITED TO BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA?


Jan. 2022
Aug. 2021
Jan. 2021
(Figures in %)
Narendra Modi 52.5 24 38
Rahul Gandhi 6.8 10 7
Yogi Adityanath 5.7 11 10
Amit Shah 3.5 7 8
Priyanka Gandhi 3.3 4 3
Nitin Gadkari 3.2 7 1
Arvind Kejriwal 3.1 8 5
Sonia Gandhi 3 4 4
Mamata Banerjee 2.6 8 4
P. Chidambaram 1.9

Note: Rest DK/ CS (Don't know/ can't say) and Others

Q. WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST FAILURE OF THE NDA GOVERNMENT?


Jan. 2022
Aug. 2021
Jan. 2021
Aug. 2020
(Figures in %)
Price rise/ Inflation 24.5 29 13 11
Unemployment 13.6 23 29 23
Farmers' protests and distress 10.3 8 9 6
Handling of Covid-19 pandemic 7.9 11 8 25
Demonetisation 6.2 7 10

Note: Rest Don't know/ can't say and others

Q. WHAT IS INDIA'S BIGGEST PROBLEM CURRENTLY?

	Feb. 2016	Aug. 2016	Jan. 2017	Aug. 2017	Jan. 2018	Aug. 2018	Jan. 2019	Aug. 2019	Jan. 2020	Aug. 2020	Jan. 2021	Aug. 2021	Jan. 2022
Unemployment	22	32	27	29	34	37	35	32	12	23	17	24.2	
Price rise/ inflation	34	29	10	19	23	24	19	10	14	3	9	19	23.7
Covid-19 pandemic										70	24	23	10.9
Corruption	34	21	21	20	17	18	15	11	12	2	7	4	7.8
Family income/ poverty													5.7
Farm distress		6	5	6	6	3	12	16	15		7	4	4.1

Rest: DK/ CS and others; all figures in per cent

Q. WHO IS THE BEST-PERFORMING MINISTER IN THE MODI GOVERNMENT?

AMIT SHAH: 39, 39, 29, 26.8

Nitin Gadkari: 10, 10, 12, 14.6

Rajnath Singh: 17, 14, 16, 11.9

Nirmala Sitharaman: 9, 8, 10, 6.4

Bhupender Yadav: 5

Aug. 2020 | Jan. 2021 | Aug. 2021 | Jan. 2022

Rest: DK/ CS and others; all figures in per cent

METHODOLOGY

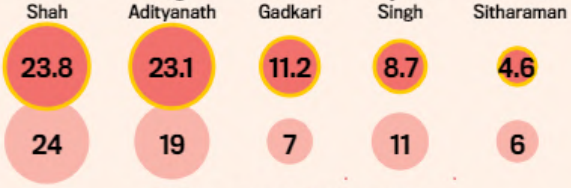
The India Today Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll was conducted by CVoter, a globally renowned name in the field of socio-economic research, between December 20, 2021, and January 10, 2022, interviewing 39,575 respondents covering all Lok Sabha segments across all states. Apart from these samples, additional 20,566 interviews from CVoter's regular tracker data between August 16, 2021, and January 10, 2022, was also analysed for the long-term trendline. Thus, the opinion of a total of 60,141 respondents was considered for this MOTN report. The margin of error is +/- 3 per cent at macro level and +/- 5 per cent at micro level of reporting with 95 per cent confidence level.

From May 2009 onwards, the CVoter Tracker has been conducted each week, resulting in 52 waves in a calendar year, in 11 national languages, across all states and UTs in India, with a target sample size of 30,000 each quarter. The average response rate is 55 per cent. Starting January 1, 2019, CVoter has been carrying the tracker on a daily basis, using the rollover sample of seven days for tracker analysis.

All these polls are based on a random probability sample as used in the globally standardised methodology, carried out by trained researchers across all geographic and demographic segments. This survey is based on CATI interviews of adult respondents across all segments. Standard RDD is used to draw random numbers covering all frequency series allocated to all operators across all telecom circles in India. CVoter ensures proper representative analysis by statistical weighing of the data to make it representative of the local population as per the latest Census figures. The data is weighted to a known Census profile, including gender, age, education, income, religion, caste, urban/rural and vote recalls for the last Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections. For the analytics, CVoter uses its proprietary algorithm to calculate the provincial and regional vote share based on the split-voter phenomenon. To visualise the geographical spread of MOTN samples, click https://teamcvoter.com/motncoverage

ANI

Q. WHO IS BEST SUITED TO SUCCEED MODI AS THE BJP's PRIME MINISTERIAL CANDIDATE?



● MOTN Jan. 2022 ● MOTN Aug. 2021

Rest: DK/ CS and others; all figure in per cent

FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE MOTN POLL SHOWS A **DEAD HEAT BETWEEN AMIT SHAH AND YOGI ADITYANATH** AS BJP'S PM CANDIDATE AFTER MODI

They could take credit for continuing to have public support in the face of unprecedented crises, unlike the Manmohan Singh government whose popularity wilted away within two years of the UPA government's second term. Yet the growing economic discontent, especially over inflation and unemployment, spells trouble for Modi and his party. The BJP's election strategy of polarisation, hyper-nationalism and individual welfarism may not be enough to see them through in 2024.

This is because while beneficiaries laud Modi for his many welfare schemes, they still want secure employment and growth in income rather than live on government doles. The MOTN survey reflects the perception that the government's economic policies have largely benefited big business. There are other related strands in the survey that Modi and his team should worry about. For one, the trepidation among people to speak out openly for fear of retribution. Then, there is the concern that democracy and its institutions are being undermined. Minorities remain sceptical about communal harmony. In the remaining years of his second term, the prime minister must take steps to address the disquiet by initiating a dialogue for a grand political reconciliation.

Modi's biggest challenge is to deliver the economic growth that could result in more jobs and prevent runaway inflation. There is concern that if there is a setback for the BJP in the UP assembly poll, the prime minister may turn more circumspect in implementing the reforms he unleashed in his second term. The recension of the farm laws is seen as one such example of him yielding to political pressures. Those who work closely with Modi, however, dismiss such misgivings and insist that the prime minister will vigorously pursue all reforms, including the massive privatisation push he has initiated. The government is confident that Omicron will not damage the economy in the way that the first wave did.

Moreover, his advisors believe that his government's recent economic stimulus and reforms, in addition to the other measures on the anvil, will ensure rapid economic development and address unemployment concerns. Dr P.K. Mishra, principal secretary to the PM, tells INDIA TODAY, "We have taken a balanced, cohesive approach with a short-, medium- and long-term perspective for growth. While both unemployment and inflation remain a challenge, we are confident we will be able to tackle them. The reform process will not slow down. The prime minister wants total change in the current systems and processes. He is convinced that India needs rapid economic growth to become a developed country by 2047." Having worked with the PM in various capacities for over two decades, Mishra goes on to add, "The prime minister now moves with a great deal of confidence and remains focused on the pace of change—he wants things to be done more quickly and monitors all issues closely." It's a faith the MOTN respondents also seem to place in the PM's ability to pull the country through the crisis and take it to greater heights. They are still banking on Modi to not let India down. ■

MOOD OF THE NATION **ECONOMY**

THE HOPE AND THE WORRY

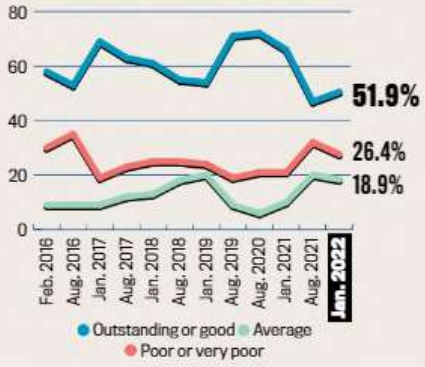
In the third year of PM Modi's second term and two years into the pandemic, a majority of Indians continue to have faith in the Centre's handling of the economy. However, high inflation, a lack of jobs and shrinking incomes mar any rosy outlook

By **M.G. ARUN & SHWWETA PUNJ**

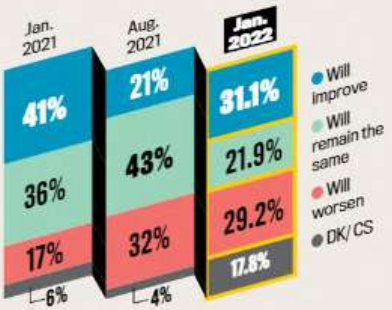
SOARING PULSE Khari Baoli market in Old Delhi. High food prices is one reason why retail inflation was at a five-month high in Dec. 2021

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

Q. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE NDA GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE ECONOMY?



Q. WHERE DO YOU SEE THE INDIAN ECONOMY IN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS?



(DK/CS: Don't know/can't say)

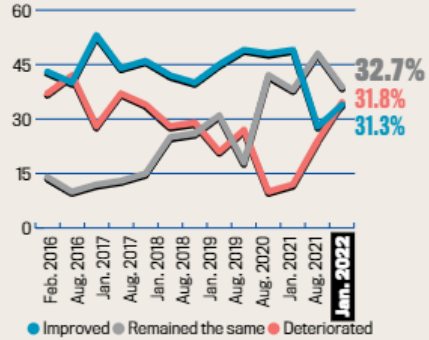
Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's second term has been filled with challenges, foremost among them being the Covid-19 pandemic, which upended India's economy, dragging growth into the negative, stoking both inflation and unemployment. Everyday Indians have suffered immense hardship, with successive waves of Covid-19 taking a toll on both lives and livelihoods. However, despite the suffering, Prime Minister Modi seems to have retained public support, be it for his handling of the pandemic or economic management. Though optimism about his handling of the economy had dropped significantly in the previous MOTN (Mood of the Nation) survey in August, it has risen this time around. What seems to have worked in his favour are the slew of welfare schemes and policy measures that have, to some extent, addressed the pain in most sectors. The economy rebounded in the second quarter of 2021-22 as business activity returned to pre-Covid levels. However, with the arrival of the fast-spreading Omicron variant, business activity has once again come under a pall of gloom.

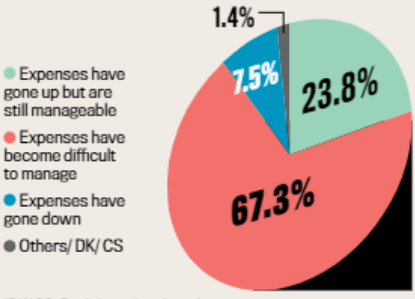
In the current MOTN poll, over half the respondents rated the NDA government's handling of the economy as 'outstanding' or 'good'. However, this is tempered by the fact that as many as 26.4 per cent rated it as 'poor' or 'very poor'. Also, only 64 per cent of respondents said their economic status had remained the same or improved since Narendra Modi took charge as prime minister, down from the nearly 76 per cent that reported a status quo or economic improvement in August 2021.

The survey was conducted in the backdrop of some persistent economic problems—for one, India's benchmark inflation rate, measured by the CPI

Q. HOW HAS YOUR ECONOMIC STATUS CHANGED SINCE NARENDRA MODI TOOK CHARGE AS PRIME MINISTER?



Q. HOW DO YOU COMPARE YOUR CURRENT DAILY EXPENSES TO THOSE OF LAST YEAR?



(DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say)

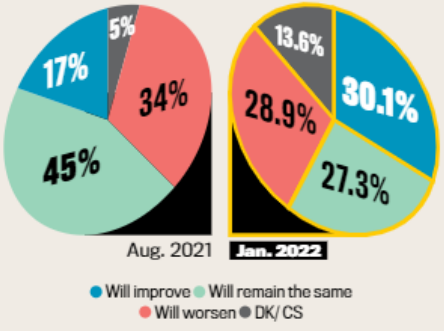
(consumer price index), rose to 5.59 per cent in December 2021, the highest in five months. The country's unemployment rate was at a four-month high in December, at 7.91 per cent, up from 7 per cent and 7.75 per cent in November and October, according to data from CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy). The urban unemployment rate rose to 9.3 per cent in December, while rural employment stood at 7.28 per cent, a significant rise from the 8.21 per cent and 6.44 per cent recorded in November. The pandemic continues to hurt the services sector, with curbs to control crowding denting firms in retail and hospitality.

In terms of future expectations, 31.1 per cent of respondents said they saw the economy improving in the next six months, while 21.9 per cent were of the opinion that it would remain the same. While 29.2 per cent said it would get worse, this was down from the 32 per cent who said so in August 2021. On incomes, an overwhelming 30.1 per cent of respondents were optimistic about their incomes improving, nearly double the 17 per cent in August. At the same time, 27.3 per cent believed their incomes would remain the same (down from 45 per cent in August), while 28.9 per cent expected their income to fall (down from 34 per cent).

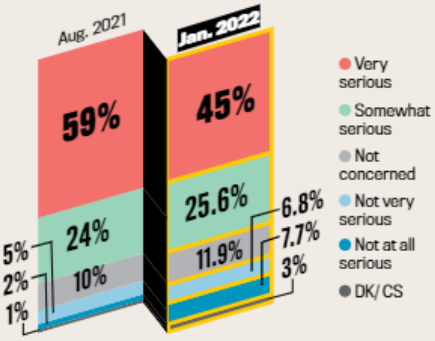
67% OF THOSE AGED 45–54 SAY **THE GOVT. HAS DONE ENOUGH TO ADDRESS COVID'S ECONOMIC DAMAGE.** ONLY **54%** OF THOSE AGED 25–34 **AGREE**

However, amidst the optimism, there are also indicators that inflation has become a serious problem. A whopping 67.3 per cent of respondents said their current daily expenses had become difficult to manage compared to last year, while only 23.8 per cent said that their expenses were still manageable (despite having risen). Inflation has remained a concern through 2021, not just in India, but across the world. Increases in commodity prices have hurt the competitiveness of businesses, whether small, medium or large. Wholesale inflation remained in double-digit territory for most of 2021—at 13.56 per cent in December, 14.23 per cent in November and 13.83 per cent in October. According to a statement from the Union ministry of commerce and industry, the high inflation in December 2021 was primarily a result of price increases for mineral oils, basic metals, crude petroleum and natural gas and food products, among other goods. Although most firms got back to business in the second half of 2021 after Covid-induced restrictions were relaxed, the economic uncertainty has impacted hiring to a great degree, especially in contact-intensive sectors like hospitality and retail. According to CMIE, some six million salaried jobs were lost in November. As many as 45 per cent of respondents said the unemployment situation in the country as 'very serious', though this was down

Q. IS YOUR HOUSEHOLD INCOME/ SALARY LIKELY TO IMPROVE?



Q. HOW DO YOU VIEW THE UNEMPLOYMENT SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY?



from 59 per cent in August. Another 25.6 per cent said the situation was 'somewhat serious'.

Shankar Chaudhary, 40, the owner of a garments business in Navi Mumbai, says the past two years have been the toughest he has seen in the two decades he has been in business. He says it is not just the restrictions that have caused trouble, but also the arbitrary manner in which they have been imposed. "There is no clarity as to when you can operate your shop," he says. "After the festival season in November, business has not been good at all." Many MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) tell similar stories, as do retailers. To be sure, their plight is not as bad as it was during the first wave of the pandemic, when there was a complete shutdown for weeks altogether, or even during the second wave, when the Delta variant ravaged the country. But the Omicron wave, arriving just as things were beginning to get better, has created problems for many.

There is a realisation among the general public that restrictions on movement and crowding help contain the spread of the virus. However, it is also true that such measures hurt businesses. As many as 52.8 per cent of those polled said restrictions helped contain the spread but impacted business activity. However, 22.3 per cent of those polled did not think that restrictions impacted livelihoods adversely. In fact, there are several businesses that have done well during the pandemic, such as those in the online space, including e-tailers and food aggregators. The successful IPOs (initial public offerings) from unicorn start-ups such as Zomato, Nykaa and Policybazaar are proof of this trend.

77%
OF RESPONDENTS FROM THE EAST **SAY UNEMPLOYMENT IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM; 56%** OF THOSE FROM THE SOUTH AGREE

However, the story is quite different for physical stores. Night and weekend curfews have hit retail and hospitality hard. The latest MOTN numbers put the general plight of Indians in perspective: as many as 64.1 per cent of those polled said their incomes had fallen, while only 22.7 per cent said there was no change in their incomes. The situation is better compared to the previous three surveys where 85 per cent or more said their incomes had fallen, but that does not offer much consolation as uncertainties related to Covid still linger.

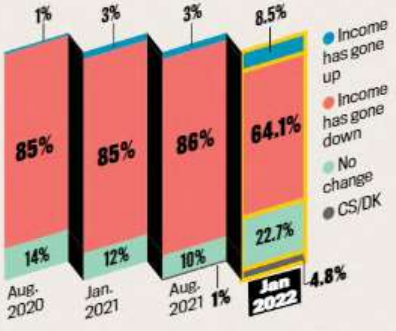
Notwithstanding the hardship, the MOTN poll indicates a general feeling that the government has done enough to counter the worst of the economic damage caused by Covid-19. A slew of measures from the Centre and state governments, especially those targeted at the poor, the farmers and small businesses offered much relief, although

HUNTING OMICRON Health workers take swab samples at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus on December 16

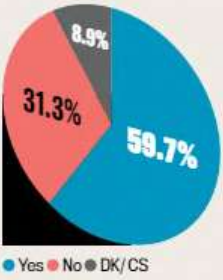
one could argue that nothing is too much in a country like India, where the scale and magnitude of problems are always challenging. A report by SBI Research in early January said the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) launched by the government in 2020 to provide relief to MSMEs impacted by the pandemic saved 1.35 million firms from going bankrupt and, consequently, 15 million jobs. This scheme was the biggest fiscal component of the Rs 20 lakh crore Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan package announced by the Centre in May 2020. However, anecdotal stories from MSMEs from across India still reveal immense distress—firms are grappling with weak demand, high absenteeism among workers due to Covid infections and narrowed profit margins due to rising material costs. But the extent of the pain is not easy to gauge without sufficient data. The Centre has said it does not have data on MSMEs that were forced to close as a result of the pandemic. At the same time, measures aimed at the poor, including the PM Kisan scheme, have helped mitigate the suffering of those impacted the most by the pandemic. As many as 59.7 per cent of those polled believed that the Centre gave enough relief to those hit by the Covid crisis through funds and other measures, while 31.3 per cent did not think so.

While MSMEs struggled, several big businesses were able to stay afloat by pruning costs, especially on travel and remuneration. Such measures, alongside lower corporate taxes, meant better profitability for big businesses despite Covid-related disruptions. In fact, some of the biggest announcements of new projects came from a few large corporates, who also rode the commodity cycle boom. As many as 47.7 per cent of respondents say that big businesses were the biggest beneficiaries of the NDA government's economic policies, with only 7.6 per cent thinking that small businesses were helped the most. Significantly, only 11.6 per cent of those polled believe that farmers have benefited the most from the Modi government's economic policies. This comes against the backdrop of the stiff resistance from farmers against the farm reforms, which forced the Centre to repeal them last year. The unorganised sector, which bore the brunt of

Q. HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED YOUR ECONOMIC STATUS?



Q. DO YOU THINK THE MODI GOVT. GAVE ENOUGH FUNDS AND TOOK OTHER MEASURES TO COUNTER THE ADVERSE ECONOMIC FALLOUT CAUSED BY COVID?



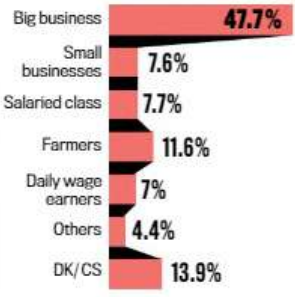
ANI

Q. DO LOCKDOWNS WORK IN PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COVID AND DO THEY CAUSE AN ADVERSE IMPACT ON LIVELIHOODS?

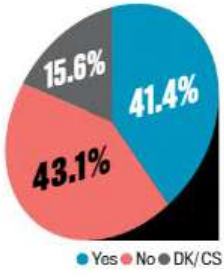
YES, they prevent the spread of Covid, but cause an adverse impact on livelihoods	52.8
YES, they prevent the spread of Covid and don't cause an adverse impact on livelihoods	22.3
NO, they don't prevent the spread of Covid but do cause an adverse impact on livelihoods	13.7
NO, they don't prevent the spread of Covid but also don't cause an adverse impact on livelihoods	5.8
DK/CS	5.4

(Figures in per cent; DK/CS: Don't know/can't say)

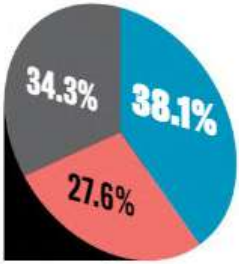
Q. WHO DO YOU THINK HAS BENEFITED THE MOST FROM THE NDA GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC POLICIES?



Q. DO YOU SUPPORT THE UNION GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO PRIVATISE AIR INDIA?



Q. DO YOU WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO BAN CRYPTOCURRENCY IN INDIA?



the pandemic, seem to have benefited the least, with just 7 per cent saying that daily wage earners have benefited the most from the government's policies.

One of the government's major attempted reforms in its second term has been its push to exit public sector enterprises. Though it announced a string of disinvestment proposals, including of Bharat Petroleum Corporation, Shipping Corporation of India and two PSU banks, the Centre has not made much headway this financial year, and will miss its disinvestment target of Rs 1.75 lakh crore by a huge margin. The only relief was the sale of Air India to the Tata Group in October for Rs 18,000 crore, with the Tatas directly paying Rs 2,700 crore and the rest going toward the airline's Rs 15,300 crore debt. But issues like privatisation and disinvestment are tricky. The sale of Air India has split public opinion down the middle—43 per cent of those polled said they did not support privatisation, while 41.4 per cent said they did. Equally strong views have not emerged in the area of cryptocurrencies, where the PM has highlighted the need for a concerted global regulatory effort. While 38.1 per cent of respondents said they wanted the Centre to ban cryptocurrencies, 34.3 per cent were unaware of the issue or did not have a strong view. The Centre is currently discussing regulations with various stakeholders and is expected to legislate on the matter soon.

With the government going into election mode, politics is likely to take precedence over good economics. The Indian economy, though bruised, is on a recovery path. And though issues like inflation don't always make headlines, they do determine the fate of governments. The clouds of the pandemic have not cleared, leaving businesses, policy makers and the general public guessing. India cannot lower its guard if it is to recover from the damage inflicted by Covid-19. ■

A NEW-LOOK OPPOSITION?

Rahul Gandhi may still be the most ideally placed to revive the fortunes of the Congress but Mamata Banerjee is seen as a better candidate to lead an Opposition alliance against the BJP

By **KAUSHIK DEKA**

PRAKASH SINGH/AFP

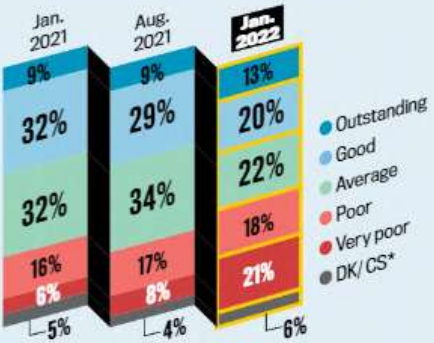
IN the final week of 2021, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced his government's decision to withdraw the three contentious farm laws, it gave opposition parties something to crow about.

Moments after his televised retreat, a video clip of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi predicting the repeal of these laws went viral on social media platforms. Derek O'Brien of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) even declared that they would again bring the government to its knees over another controversial bill (the Election Laws Bill 2021) that proposes to link Aadhaar numbers to voter IDs.

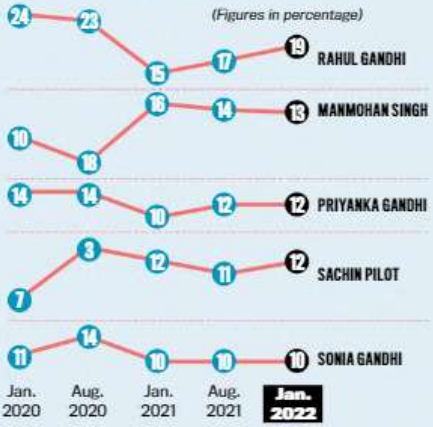
However, the collective enthusiasm of Opposition parties, manifest in their combative mood in Parliament, has not found much resonance among the people, it appears from our latest Mood of the Nation poll. The January 2022 edition of the poll reveals that 43.1 per cent of respondents believe the opposition parties are responsible for frequent disruptions in Parliament while 32 per cent put the blame at the doorstep of the government.

Leading from the back Rahul joins protests against MPs' suspension, Dec. 2021

Q. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE CONGRESS AS AN OPPOSITION PARTY?



Q. WHICH CONGRESS LEADER IS BEST SUITED TO REVIVE THE PARTY?


(Figures in percentage)
24 23 15 17 19 RAHUL GANDHI
10 13 18 14 13 MANMOHAN SINGH
14 14 10 12 12 PRIYANKA GANDHI
7 13 12 11 12 SACHIN PILOT
11 14 10 10 10 SONIA GANDHI
Jan. 2020
Aug. 2020
Jan. 2021
Aug. 2021
Jan. 2022

Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

The public anger and anguish caused by the devastation of the Covid second wave had put the Modi government on the defensive. The opposition parties also did their damnedest to corner the government on its handling of the pandemic, yet more than half the respondents (53 per cent) believe opposition parties criticised the government for the heck of it; only 32 per cent said the opposition held the government to account in a constructive manner.

The apparent lack of faith in the Opposition seems to bear a direct relationship to the performance of the Congress. Two lacklustre performances in back-to-back Lok Sabha elections (2014 and 2019) and the unending uncertainty over the top leadership have badly dented public perception of the only truly national Opposition party. The public feud among leaders in the handful of states it rules has not helped matters either. Consequently, as seen in successive MOTN polls, popular support for the party has declined—with only 33 per cent rating its performance as 'good' in this edition, down from 41 per cent in January 2021.

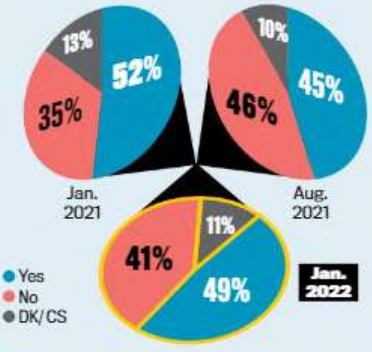
58.3% RESPONDENTS FROM THE WEST THINK THE **CONGRESS WOULD BE BETTER OFF WITHOUT THE GANDHIS**

Despite unrelenting criticism from the BJP and even other opposition parties, Rahul Gandhi remains the best bet for the party to chart a revival—nearly 18 per cent respondents backed him as the best suited leader to revive the Congress, down from 24 per cent in January 2020 but up from 15 per cent a year ago. However, a growing number (49 per cent in this edition from 45 per cent six months ago) think the Congress will be better off without the Gandhis.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi and AICC general secretary in-charge of Uttar Pradesh Priyanka Gandhi have seen a dip in popular support. In fact, Priyanka, who is trying to engineer the party's revival in UP and spearheading its campaign in the state for the forthcoming assembly election, has slipped to #4 in the list of leaders best suited to revive the party.

In contrast, 30 per cent respondents back 89-year-old Manmohan Singh to head the Congress (up from 27 per cent a year ago). The next most popular (12 per cent) non-Gandhi is 44-year-old Sachin Pilot, former

Q. DO YOU THINK THE CONGRESS WILL BE BETTER OFF WITHOUT THE GANDHI FAMILY?



Q. HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE ROLE OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES DURING THE PANDEMIC?

	Jan. 2022	Aug. 2021	Jan. 2021	Aug. 2020
They criticised the government for the sake of criticism	53%	51%	49%	53%
They held the govt accountable with constructive criticism	32%	37%	38%	33%
DK/CS	15%	12%	13%	14%

Q. WHO AMONG THE NON-GANDHI LEADERS IS BEST SUITED TO LEAD THE CONGRESS?

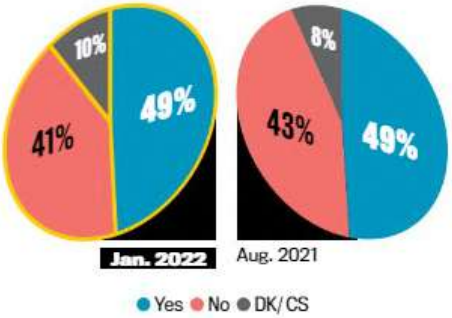
	Jan. 2022	Aug. 2021	Jan. 2021
MANMOHAN SINGH	30%	28%	27%
SACHIN PILOT	12%	17%	17%
P. CHIDAMBARAM	5%	7%	8%
ASHOK GEHLOT	4%	6%	6%
KAMAL NATH	4%	9%	8%
GHULAM NABI AZAD	4%	5%	4%

Rest: Others

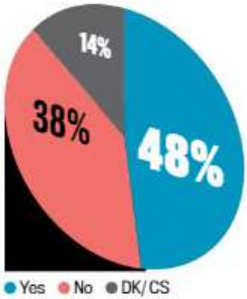
COMING TOGETHER
West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee with NCP chief Sharad Pawar in Mumbai

PRATIK CHORGE/GETTY IMAGES

Q. DO YOU THINK AN OPPOSITION ALLIANCE IS POSSIBLE TO CHALLENGE THE MODI-LED BJP AT THE CENTRE?



Q. DO YOU THINK MAMATA BANERJEE'S TMC CAN BUILD, AND LEAD, AN ALLIANCE OF OPPOSITION PARTIES?

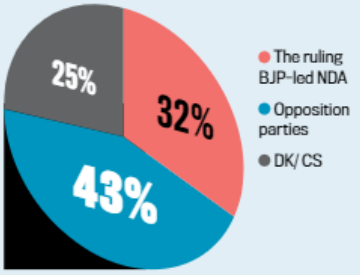


WHO AMONG THE CURRENT OPPOSITION LEADERS IS BEST SUITED TO LEAD THE OPPOSITION ALLIANCE?

	Jan. 2022	Aug. 2021	Jan. 2021
MAMATA BANERJEE	17%	17%	11%
ARVIND KEJRIWAL	16%	20%	18%
RAHUL GANDHI	11%		
AKHILESH YADAV	7%	8%	8%
SONIA GANDHI	10%		
SHARAD PAWAR	5%	6%	7%
MAYAWATI	2%	5%	6%
NAVEEN PATNAIK	1%	5%	5%
UDDHAV THACKERAY	3%		
JAGAN MOHAN REDDY	1%	5%	4%
M.K. STALIN	2%		
TEJASHWI YADAV	1%	3%	4%

Rest: Others

Q. WHO, ACCORDING TO YOU, IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FREQUENT DISRUPTIONS IN PARLIAMENT?



deputy chief minister of Rajasthan, who turned rebel in 2020, seeking to replace incumbent chief minister Ashok Gehlot. However, Pilot's stature as a Congress leader has diminished in the public eye, with his rating slipping from a personal high of 17 per cent in the previous MOTN.

The uncertainty about the party's leadership and its diminishing electoral footprint have encouraged other opposition parties, such as the TMC, to stake their claims as the fulcrum of the anti-BJP Opposition. Alliances are now being negotiated and forged without the Congress playing a key role. For instance, West Bengal chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee has decided to campaign for Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party in the UP assembly election, due in February/March. There is apparent public support for such a push—nearly 48 per cent believe the TMC can build—and lead—an effective alliance of opposition parties. Bolstered by a comprehensive victory against the BJP in the West Bengal assembly election last year, Mamata Banerjee has emerged as the favourite among Opposition leaders to lead an alliance—with more than 17 per cent respondents backing her, up from 11 per cent exactly a year ago. In contrast, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who heads the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), has seen a drop in his acceptance as leader of an Opposition alliance—from 20 per cent six months ago to 15.5 per cent now. Not good news for him, considering his ambition to wield greater national influence, and his party's forays into other states such as Punjab, Gujarat, Uttarakhand and Goa.

53% 18 TO 24-YR-OLDS, AND 49% ACROSS ALL AGE GROUPS, **THINK AN OPPOSITION ALLIANCE TO CHALLENGE BJP** AT THE CENTRE IS POSSIBLE

Despite the swinging popularity ratings of individual leaders and the jockeying for influence among them, voters are hopeful of the formation of an effective alliance to challenge the Modi-led BJP at the Centre, with nearly 50 per cent respondents backing the idea. What's even more encouraging for the opposition parties is that the share of naysayers has decreased—from 43 per cent six months ago to 41 per cent now. Now for the harder task of these opposition leaders managing to get their act together, rise above personal ambitions, and justify the public trust. ■

आज तक

देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज़ ऐप

जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें

aajtak.in/app

उपलब्ध है

TOP DRAWS

Regional players dominate the public mindspace when it comes to the performance of heads of Indian states

By **KAUSHIK DEKA**

MANEESH AGNIHOTRI

1. YOGI ADITYANATH
Uttar Pradesh
27.1% [19%]

In an unusual move, West Bengal chief minister and Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo Mamata Banerjee has decided to campaign for the Samajwadi Party (SP) in the run-up to the Uttar Pradesh assembly election scheduled in February and March. To have the chief minister of one state campaigning in another is not unusual except for the fact that Mamata's TMC and Akhilesh Yadav's SP are not part of any formal alliance. Moreover, the TMC has no electoral stake in UP. Yet the SP reached out to Mamata, who had trounced the BJP in West Bengal last year, because it is up against one of the tallest leaders in the saffron stable—Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath.

For the fourth consecutive time in the INDIA TODAY MOTN poll, the monk-turned-politician has been rated as the most popular chief minister—27.1 per cent of the 60,141 respondents across the country think he has been the best performing chief minister in India. For Yogi Adityanath, it's a jump of eight percentile points since the last MOTN poll in August 2021. However, it has not been a smooth or unmitigated ascent. His acceptance soars in certain geography and caste groups—he ranks top among 45 per cent respondents from north India and 41 per cent respondents from upper-caste Hindus. At the same time, only 10 per cent respondents from south India and 5 per cent Muslim respondents back him as the No.1 CM. Despite his soaring popularity, the Hindutva icon remains a polarising figure in national politics.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is the only

MOST POPULAR CM (ACROSS INDIA)

Respondents across states were asked to rate who they thought to be the best performing CM in the country

2. ARVIND KEJRIWAL
Delhi
19.9% [14%]

3. MAMATA BANERJEE
West Bengal
10.8% [11%]

4. M.K. STALIN
Tamil Nadu
6.7%

5. UDDHAV THACKERAY
Maharashtra
4.9% [5%]

6. Y.S. JAGAN MOHAN REDDY
Andhra Pradesh
3.3% [6%]

7. NAVEEN PATNAIK
Odisha
3.2% [5%]

8. NITISH KUMAR
Bihar
2.3% [5%]

Aug. '21 MOTN figures in [ ]

Note: All respondents across all states were asked to rate the performance of India's 30 chief ministers. The ratings are the perception of all respondents across India. So, 27.1 per cent of 60,141 respondents rated Yogi Adityanath as the No. 1 chief minister in India

1. NAVEEN PATNAIK
Odisha
71.1%

ANI

MOST POPULAR CM (IN HOME STATE)

Respondents in every state were asked to rate their own chief minister

2. MAMATA BANERJEE
West Bengal
69.9%

3. M.K. STALIN
Tamil Nadu
67.5%

4. UDDHAV THACKERAY
Maharashtra
61.8%

5. PINARAYI VIJAYAN
Kerala
61.1%

6. ARVIND KEJRIWAL
Delhi
57.9%

7. HIMANTA BISWA SARMA
Assam
56.6%

8. BHUPESH BAGHEL
Chhattisgarh
51.4%

9. ASHOK GEHLOT
Rajasthan
44.9%

Note: Respondents of every state were asked to evaluate the performance of their own CM. So, 71.1 per cent respondents of the total of 2,743 from Odisha said they were satisfied with Naveen Patnaik, while 69.9 per cent of the 4,982 respondents from West Bengal expressed satisfaction at Mamata Banerjee's performance. CMs who scored higher than the national average satisfaction rate of 43 per cent have been considered for this ranking.

other chief minister whose national ratings have gone up since the last MOTN in August—from 14 per cent to 20 per cent. The most significant aspect of his popularity is that he gets maximum support—35 per cent—from Sikhs, a community that dominates the politics of Punjab, where his party, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), is a key player in the forthcoming assembly election. Among all chief ministers, he also has the highest support from scheduled tribes, with 33 per cent favouring him. He is also the second most popular chief minister among Muslims with 25 per cent respondents giving him top rating while 26 per cent chose Mamata Banerjee as the best performing head of a state.

When it comes to the chief ministers' performance within their own states, Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik is No.1, with 71 per cent respondents expressing their satisfaction with his governance. He is closely followed by Mamata Banerjee who has been able to make 70 per cent respondents in her state happy. There are only nine chief ministers who have a higher share of satisfied respondents in their own states than the average of 43 per cent.

What's also interesting is that this list is dominated by regional stalwarts who occupy the top six positions. Among the national parties, the Congress does well with two of its three chief ministers—Chhattisgarh's Bhupesh Baghel and Rajasthan's Ashok Gehlot—among the top nine. While the BJP has 13 chief ministers, only one of them—newly-installed Himanta Biswa Sarma from Assam—found place among the top nine, with 57 per cent respondents from the state expressing satisfaction at his performance. The BJP's most celebrated chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, is also missing from that list.

Another debutant chief minister—Tamil Nadu's M.K. Stalin—has earned the satisfaction of 68 per cent of the respondents from his state, propelling him to No.3 position. In fact, satraps like Stalin have been rated high not only within the state, but have also shown increasing popularity across the country. TMC chief Mamata Banerjee, DMK president Stalin and Maharashtra chief minister and Shiv Sena supremo Uddhav Thackeray are the three chief ministers who are among the top five in both lists—the one based on the ratings by respondents across all states and the other based on the ratings given by respondents from the home state of the chief minister. That's a lesson the national parties may want to learn from these veterans. ■

VACCINE WITHOUT WANING

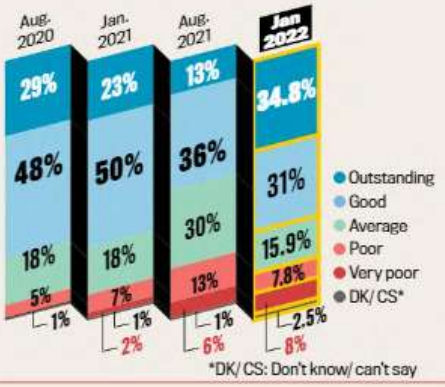
A majority of MOTN respondents give a thumbs up to the Union government's vaccination drive and Covid efforts, with Odisha scoring top marks among states for its handling of the pandemic

By **SONALI ACHARJEE**

On January 7, a year after India commenced the world's largest vaccination programme, the country achieved a landmark when it finished administering a total of 1.5 billion doses. In comparison, the US has administered 520 million doses, the UK 130.7 million. At present, 92 per cent of India's eligible adult population has received the first dose of the vaccine while 70 per cent have received both doses. The programme has been so successful that Union health minister Mansukh Mandaviya calls it a "role model for the global community". Indeed, few countries have had to vaccinate a population as large or as geographically varied as India. From sending vaccines via drones to far-flung regions in the upper Himalayas, to mobilising local community leaders to overcome vaccine hesitancy, the programme has conquered several obstacles.

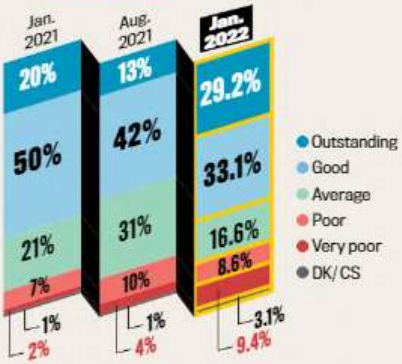
It should therefore come as no surprise that the latest MOTN survey finds an overwhelming 82 per cent respondents endorsing the vaccination programme as a success, with nearly 49 per cent rating the government's efforts 'outstanding'. "We have been consistent in our efforts. Over the past year, vaccine supply and availability have been streamlined. Our healthcare workers have worked very hard. Our coverage today is remarkable,"

Q. HOW DO YOU RATE THE NARENDRA MODI GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?



*DK/CS: Don't know/can't say

Q. HOW DO YOU RATE YOUR STATE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF COVID-19?

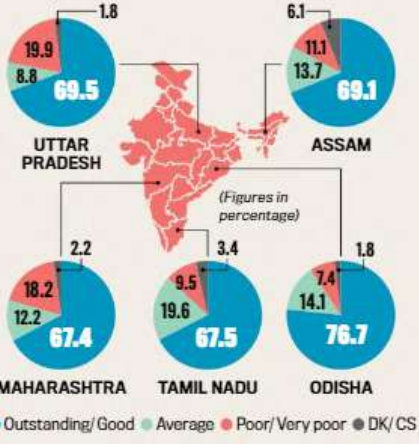


ON THE JOB A healthcare worker checks on a patient at Delhi's CWG village Covid care centre

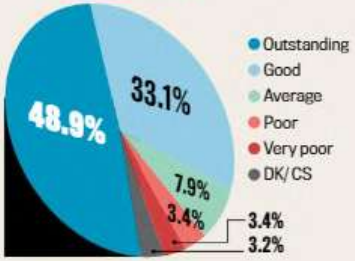
PTI

THE BEST COVID FIGHTERS

The top five states with the highest number of respondents expressing satisfaction with their respective government's response to the pandemic



Q. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE UNION GOVERNMENT'S VACCINATION EFFORT?



Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

says Dr V.K. Paul, chairman of the country's vaccine committee.

Having reached major milestones in the coverage for adults, the programme has now further diversified to include those between the ages of 15 and 18 years. Within two weeks of the first jabs being given, 46 per cent of those eligible have already received a single dose. A third 'precaution' dose has also been given to 1.8 million healthcare workers and 1.4 million frontline workers to further protect them from the new strain of Covid, designated Omicron.

When it comes to the handling of the pandemic itself, while 66 per cent still express faith in the government, the figure is lower than the 73 per cent that had lauded the government's efforts in the January 2021 MOTN poll. The lethal second wave, spurred by the highly infectious Delta variant in March 2021, officially claimed around 400,000 lives and caused long-term health and financial implications for thousands more. The chaos and devastation of that wave still remains fresh in the minds of many. However, between August 2021 and January 2022, the country saw a period of low infectivity, with only 37 new cases, zero deaths and a positivity rate of 0.06 per cent on October 24, 2021. The latest MOTN poll shows that nearly 35 per cent find the government's Covid efforts to be 'outstanding', nearly double of the 13 per cent who expressed the same sentiment in August 2021, a few months after the second wave subsided.

The relative lull since the second wave has also revived faith in state healthcare efforts. MOTN results find 62 per cent happy with their states' performance, versus 55 per cent in August 2021 and 70 per cent in January 2021. Respondents from Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have expressed the maximum level of satisfaction with their state's efforts.

Odisha, which topped with 76.7 per cent finding the state's performance to be 'outstanding', has not only succeeded in keeping mortality and infection figures low, but was also the first in the country to fully vaccinate the entire population of its capital city, Bhubaneswar. When it comes to Covid management, the public not only wants governments to provide medical infrastructure during surges, but have also expressed equal interest in knowing what steps are being taken to prevent future waves. Keeping the population safe in the long term is what has come to matter the most. ■

MIXED MESSAGES

ANI

While Indian citizens worry about the state of Indian democracy, they are optimistic about corruption and eager for change

By **AMARNATH K. MENON**

Public concern about the current state of Indian democracy remains high, according to the INDIA TODAY MOTN (Mood of the Nation) poll. With 43.7 per cent of respondents in the latest poll saying they thought that democracy is in danger—though marginally less than in the previous MOTN in August 21—the trend of thought has remained worryingly constant.

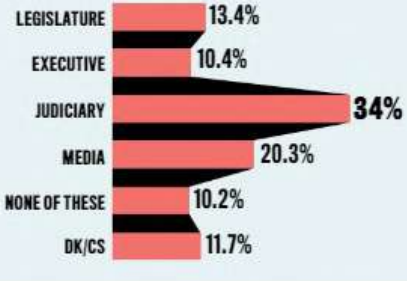
In healthy democracies, citizens participate vigorously and effectively in the shaping of the policies and laws by which they are governed. Democratic constitutions provide for elected assemblies for citizens' representatives to formulate new polices and pass laws. What is imperative is a process of democratic deliberation among citizens themselves.

In the opinion of 34 per cent of MOTN respondents,

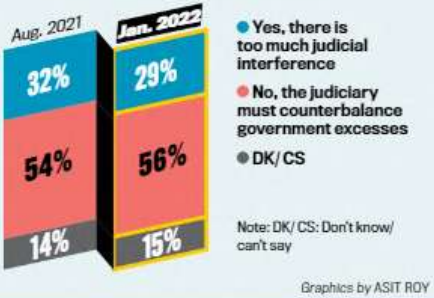
Q. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA?

COURTING APPROVAL
The judicial system is said to best uphold India's democratic norms

Q. OF THE FOUR PILLARS OF DEMOCRACY, WHICH DO YOU THINK HAS BEST UPHELD DEMOCRATIC NORMS IN INDIA?



Q. DO YOU AGREE WITH THE PERCEPTION THAT COURTS HAVE BEEN INTERVENING UNDULY IN AFFAIRS BEST LEFT TO THE GOVERNMENT?



Note: DK/CS: Don't know/ can't say

Graphics by ASIT ROY

of the four pillars of democracy in India, the judiciary does the best job in upholding democratic norms, followed by the media at 20.3 per cent. While the legislature got only 13.4 per cent—probably a reflection of a dysfunctional Parliament—sadly, the executive has the confidence of only 10.4 per cent. Clearly, the courts are the surest bastion of citizens' rights—or sentiments. There is also a growing belief that the judiciary must counterbalance government excesses, with 56 per cent of respondents saying so, a two percentage point increase since August 2021. There is also a drop from 32 per cent to 29 per cent in the same period in the perception that the judiciary

A THIRD OF RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THE JUDICIARY DOES THE BEST JOB IN UPHOLDING DEMOCRATIC NORMS

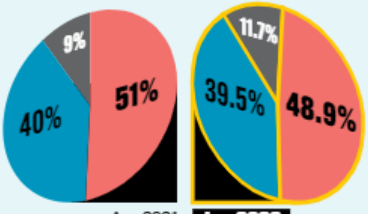
is unnecessarily interfering in matters relating to governance. These are arguably urgent signals of growing public disquiet at the darkening shadows of elected authoritarianism and the need to build robust institutions for citizens' participation in democratic governance.

Both the right to dissent and protest in public as well as the enforcement of law, in cases of financial impropriety, are issues of concern. Our governments have notoriously relied on sedition laws of colonial provenance to silence voices of dissent. A little less than half of those polled (48.9 per cent) believe people are scared to protest or express themselves on any public platform for fear of arrest. That said, respondents holding such apprehensions accounted for 51 per cent of opinion in August 2021, suggesting a marginal decrease in this perception.

When it comes to fighting that perennial bugbear, corruption, however, the majority of respondents (55.5 per cent) seem convinced that the Narendra Modi government has been effective in reducing it. Over 41 per cent believe that government agencies such as the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation), the ED (Enforcement Directorate), the IT (Income Tax) department and the Central Vigilance Commission, through their searches and inquiries, are better equipped to control corruption. Others (19.9 per cent) believe the courts are the best check, while 13.5 per cent bank on the Lok Pal to do the job.

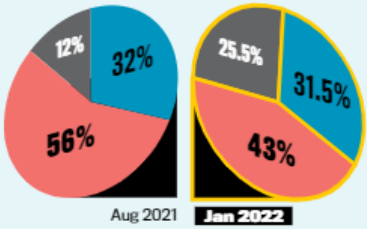
Privacy is an overwhelming concern (56.4 per cent) for those using digital media such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp; 35.7 per cent of respondents expressed worry and despair over this issue. Another 20.7 per cent are concerned about privacy, but are actively taking action to protect themselves. Many experts point to the recent original traceability laws as a particular threat to the data security and online privacy of Indian citizens .

Q. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ABOUT THE 'RIGHT TO PROTEST' IN PUBLIC IN INDIA?



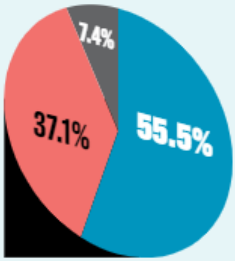
● People are scared of protesting or expressing anything on any platform, as they fear arrest ● There are no issues in protesting or expressing anything on any platform ● CS/ DK

Q. DO YOU THINK BJP GOVTS. MISUSE ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES (ED/ CBI/ IT DEPT) MORE THAN OTHER GOVTS.?



● Yes ● No, governments of all parties misuse these agencies ● CS/ DK

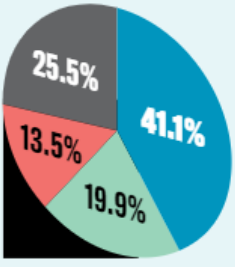
Q. HAS THE MODI GOVERNMENT SUCCEEDED IN REDUCING CORRUPTION IN INDIA?



● Yes ● No ● DK/ CS

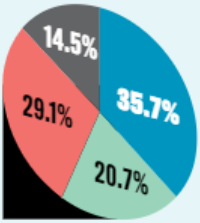
(Note: DK/ CS: Don't know, can't say;

Q. WHICH AGENCY OR INSTITUTION CAN BEST CONTROL CORRUPTION?



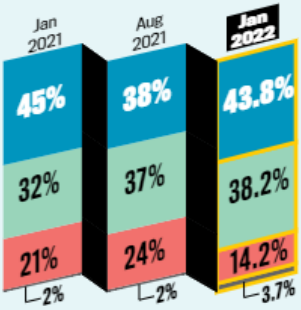
● Government enforcement agencies (the CBI, ED, CVC and IT department, etc.) ● The Courts ● The Lok Pal ● DK/CS

Q. DO YOU FEEL WORRIED ABOUT YOUR PRIVACY ON DIGITAL MEDIA LIKE FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND WHATSAPP?



● Yes, I don't know what to do
● Yes, but I take measures to protect my privacy
● No, I don't feel worried about my privacy
● DK/CS

Q. HAS INDIA BECOME SAFER OR LESS SAFE FOR WOMEN?



● Become safer for women ● Become less safe for women ● Remained the same ● DK/CS

Analysts admit that while there exists a legitimate State interest in surveillance, ensuring transparency and accountability in the functioning of government agencies is equally important. They say it is vital to commission a nationwide study of the technology requirements of law enforcement agencies, streamline the process to access digital evidence, and build the capacity of law enforcement agencies to analyse metadata.

More reassuringly, the perception that India has become safer for women has spread to 43.8 per cent of MOTN respondents. In August 2021, it was just 38.8 per cent. Similarly, the MOTN survey reveals a growing perception that communal harmony has improved under the NDA government. This is the view of 45.5 per cent of respondents—still a significant rise from the 34 per cent recorded in the MOTN poll of August 2021 but lower than the January 2021 poll, which saw 55 per cent.

80%

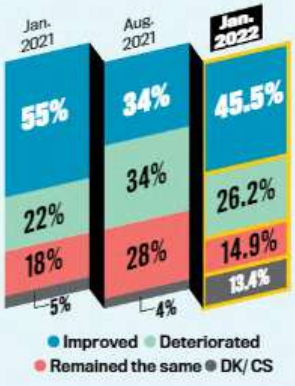
OF UPPER CASTE HINDUS AND 78% OF OBCs **WANT A UNIFORM CIVIL CODE BUT** ONLY 58% OF MUSLIMS WANT ONE

On the issue of implementing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), the MOTN reveals an overwhelming 72. 7 per cent of respondents in favour of such a move. This is a growing trend (65 per cent of respondents expressed the same view in the MOTN poll of August 2021). The UCC would provide for one law for the entire country, applicable to all religious communities in their personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption.

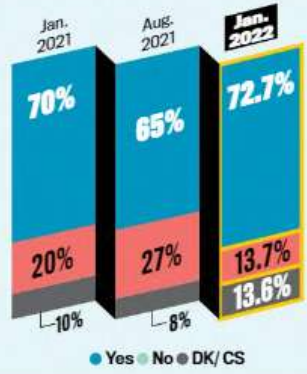
The government maintains that the legislature in its wisdom has to formulate a UCC. It has allowed the matter to rest there for the time being, stating that the Law Commission's views on the matter are awaited. The Law Commission is trying to codify the various personal laws of different communities. Meanwhile, on January 7, the Supreme Court has given the government a "last opportunity" to make its stand clear and has directed that all petitions on the matter pending in high courts be transferred to it for adjudication. But from the affidavit submitted by the government to the Delhi High Court recently, it seems evident that the government does not consider this a matter for judicial resolution. It has signalled that the UCC is a policy matter to be decided by the legislature—and that only the government will decide the specifics and the timing of the decision. It's worth noting that Goa has had a UCC since 1965, which applies to all of its residents.

Substance abuse is a growing trend. On December 21, the Parliament passed a bill to rectify errors that had crept into the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.

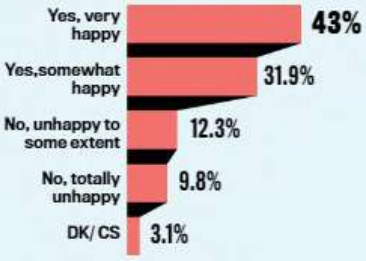
Q. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF COMMUNAL HARMONY UNDER THE NDA-LED UNION GOVERNMENT?



Q. SHOULD A UNIFORM CIVIL CODE BE IMPLEMENTED IN INDIA?



Q. DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF HAPPY?



DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say

BURIED TENSIONS Protestors at New Delhi's Maujpur Jaffrabad on Feb 24, 2020—part of the '2020 Delhi Riots'

EIGHTY ONE PER CENT OF PEOPLE IN NORTH INDIA ARE HAPPY, AS AGAINST 60 PER CENT IN THE SOUTH

The rectification will be followed by another amendment as the Union government is working to decriminalise personal consumption of small quantities of drugs, narcotics and psychotropic substances. Further changes are also being made to the NDPS law even as seizures of contraband are on the rise. The NDPS Act also prohibits the use of cannabis (ganja) and this is being challenged in courts use on various grounds including medicinal and industrial use. However more than half the MOTN respondents (50.4 per cent) are opposed to decriminalising cannabis in India.

Yet, despite the relatively slow pace at which meaningful reforms are being brought in, the majority of respondents (75 per cent) said they were very happy or somewhat happy with the pace of change in the country. The bigger picture, in comparative terms, is a more telling story. The WHR20 Happiness Report released in March 2021 by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network compares citizens' own perceptions of their well-being in 153 countries. According to the report, Indian citizens are amongst the least happy in the world: India ranks a very low 144th. ■

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13th BRICS SUMMIT

MOOD OF THE NATION | DEFENCE/ FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BIG STICK DIPLOMACY

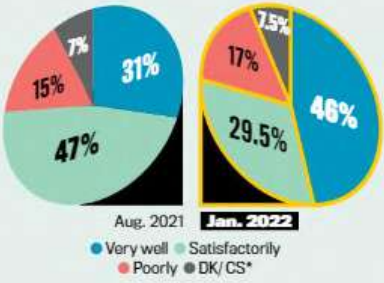
China and Pakistan remain New Delhi's big external challenges, but MOTN respondents endorse the government's stance on both, and a harder one on Kashmir

By **SANDEEP UNNITHAN**

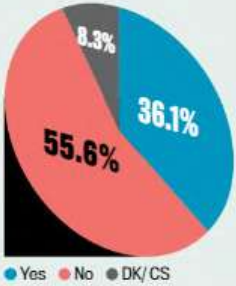
India entered the new year looking at what could be a third year of a military stand-off with China in eastern Ladakh. A 14th round of Corps Commander-level talks on January 12 failed to resolve the military impasse that began in May 2020 when China moved two divisions across Ladakh. Both armies continue to eyeball each other at three contentious spots. And as long as these friction points remain, both sides will continue to deploy close to 100,000 troops at their respective ends at extremely high altitudes, making it the world's longest such military deployment.

TOP TIER A poster for the virtual 13th BRICS summit, featuring (from left) Brazilian president Michel Temer, Russian president Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chinese president Xi Jinping & South African president Cyril Ramaphosa

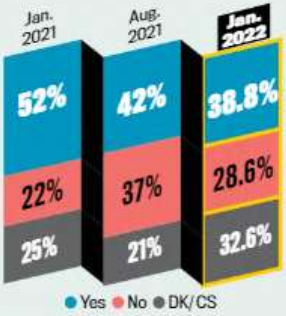
Q. HOW HAS THE GOVERNMENT HANDLED THE CHINESE INTRUSIONS ON THE BORDER SO FAR?



Q. SHOULD INDIA RESUME TALKS WITH PAKISTAN?



Q. IS JOE BIDEN AS US PRESIDENT GOOD FOR INDIA?

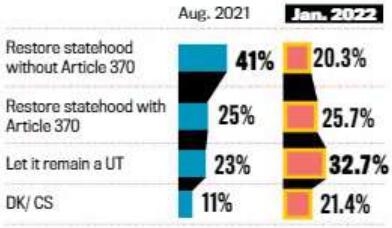


DK/CS: Don't know/ can't say

China's new boundary law signals a hardening of its stance on long-running boundary disputes like the one with India. The permanent structures it is building on the Tibetan plateau signal it is there for the long haul. There have been no violent incidents on the border since the June 15, 2020, Galwan clashes in which 20 Indian soldiers and four Chinese ones were killed. Vigilance on the boundary pays, as the government discovered, since it allows them to resolve the boundary flashpoints using diplomacy and military dialogue. Seventy five per cent of the MOTN respondents believe that the central government has handled the border stand-off with China very well—a slight dip from the 78 per cent who endorsed the government's stance in August 2021.

The escalatory potential of the conflict with China means that New Delhi's other major foreign policy headache—Pakistan—looks relatively manageable. Given the perilous state of its economy and its hand-to-handout existence, Pakistan seems incapable of being a significant threat in the short term. The country's newly unveiled national security policy speaks of wanting to improve relations with India, but, from New Delhi's standpoint, there can be no talks as long as Islamabad continues to foment cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. Over 55 per cent of the respondents do not want dialogue to resume.

Q. SHOULD THE UNION GOVERNMENT RESTORE STATEHOOD TO JAMMU & KASHMIR?



The Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir—parts of which remain under Chinese and Pakistani occupation—is thus in greater focus than before. Three years ago, New Delhi bifurcated the erstwhile state of J&K into UTs and diluted Article 370. There is a hardening of the respondents' stand towards the return to normalcy in the state with a discernible dip from the 66 per cent in the MOTN of August 2021 in favour of restoring statehood to 46 per cent now.

The China-Pakistan axis means India will need the support of friends like the US. India-US relations have been on an upswing for the past two decades. Besides being a major strategic ally, the US is India's largest trading partner—bilateral trade is set to cross $145 billion (around Rs 10.7 lakh crore) in 2020-21. The steady decline in US president Joe Biden's MOTN ratings is, therefore, somewhat of a mystery. From a high of 52 per cent who viewed him favourably in January 2021, it slipped to 42 per cent in August and now just 38.8 per cent think he is good for India. This is perhaps one more reason why Biden needs to take up Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation to visit New Delhi. ■

Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

TAKING THE LEAD

Actresses in their 40s are topping the OTT chart, while the Bachchan father and son hold on to pole positions in both the general and OTT categories

By **SUHANI SINGH**

In the entertainment world, actors know that "being seen" is "being relevant", whether it is getting papped at the airport or sharing a selfie from the Maldives. Katrina Kaif topped the MOTN poll for the first time since 2014 not simply for her role in the action drama *Sooryavanshi*, Hindi cinema's biggest hit of 2021, but also because of her three-day wedding extravaganza that dominated headlines for almost a month. The entry of 'Vicktrina' (the 'Vick' referring to her actor-husband Vicky Kaushal) to a landscape that includes other celebrity couplings—'Virushka' and 'Deepveer'—and Kaif's jig in *Sooryavanshi* to a remixed version of 'Tip Tip Barsa Paani', which has garnered over 200 million views on YouTube, ensured that the 38-year-old ended Deepika Padukone's seven-year reign at the top.

Raveena Tandon made her streaming debut with the Netflix series *Aranyak*, which led to her debuting in the OTT star (female) category. In doing so, she trumped Sushmita Sen, the second season of whose acclaimed drama *Aarya* (Disney+ Hotstar) also released on December 10. The presence of three 40-something actresses in the top five—Pooja Bhatt being the third for her role in *Bombay Begums*—demonstrates how female-led narratives are thriving on SVOD (special video-on-demand) platforms. It is in stark contrast to the top five heroines, of whom only one has done a substantial role since the last edition of the MOTN poll—Kangana Ranaut in *Thalaivi*.

Where men are concerned, Amitabh Bachchan only consolidated his No.1 ranking. The 79-year-old's October release, *Chehre*, may have fizzled at the box office, but on the small screen, he entertained families as the genial host of *Kaun Banega*

PARESH MEHTA

1 AMITABH BACHCHAN 30.6% [24%]

Q. WHO IS THE NO.1 HERO IN THE COUNTRY?

2 AKSHAY KUMAR 12% [18%*]

3 SALMAN KHAN 7% [8%]

4 SHAH RUKH KHAN 5.2% [9%]

5 RAJINIKANTH 3.9% [10%]

1 KATRINA KAIF 7.2% [11%]

SANDEEP SINGH

Q. WHO IS THE NO.1 HEROINE IN THE COUNTRY?

2 DEEPIKA PADUKONE 6.8% [17%]

3 PRIYANKA CHOPRA 6.3% [10%]

4 KANGANA RANAUT 4.9% [10%]

5 KAREENA KAPOOR KHAN 3.6%

Aug. '21 MOTN figures in []

Q. WHO IS THE NO.1 OTT STAR (MALE) IN THE COUNTRY?

1 ABHISHEK BACHCHAN 12.5% [20%]

2 MANOJ BAJPAYEE 9.8% [12%]

3 BOBBY DEOL 7.1% [10%]

4 SAIF ALI KHAN 4.7% [10%]

5 NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI 3.7% [7%]

Q. WHO IS THE NO.1 OTT STAR (FEMALE) IN THE COUNTRY?

1 RAVEENA TANDON 16.%

2 SUSHMITA SEN 12.2% [21%]

3 RADHIKA APTE 2.7% [7%]

4 POOJA BHATT 2.5%

5 HUMA QURESHI 1.8%

Crorepati. Few actors have built such an enduring connection with their fans as Bachchan has. Akshay Kumar and Salman Khan come close. The two occupied the No.2 and 3 spots, though they lost some ground, despite their theatrical releases—*Sooryavanshi* and *Antim: The Final Truth*, respectively.

Abhishek Bachchan, too, retained the top spot in the No.1 OTT star (male) category thanks to the release of *Bob Biswas* on Zee5. The actor played a younger version of the eponymous character first seen in Sujoy Ghosh's *Kahaani* and portrayed by Saswata Chatterjee. The film was one of the most watched titles on the platform. Abhishek was followed by Manoj Bajpayee (*The Family Man 2*), Bobby Deol (*Aashram*), Saif Ali Khan (*Tandav*) and Nawazuddin Siddqui (*Serious Men*), all of whom have seen a professional resurgence thanks to OTT. Unlike their female counterparts, the boundaries between OTT and big screen are blurred for the actors, who find themselves shuttling between formats. Bachchan, Salman and Akshay have done so with *Gulabo Sitabo*, *Radhe* and *Laxmmi* and *Atrangi Re*. With the third wave of Covid disrupting 2022's theatrical calendar, audiences are likely to see more heroes and heroines straddling both worlds. ■

STARS ARE BORN

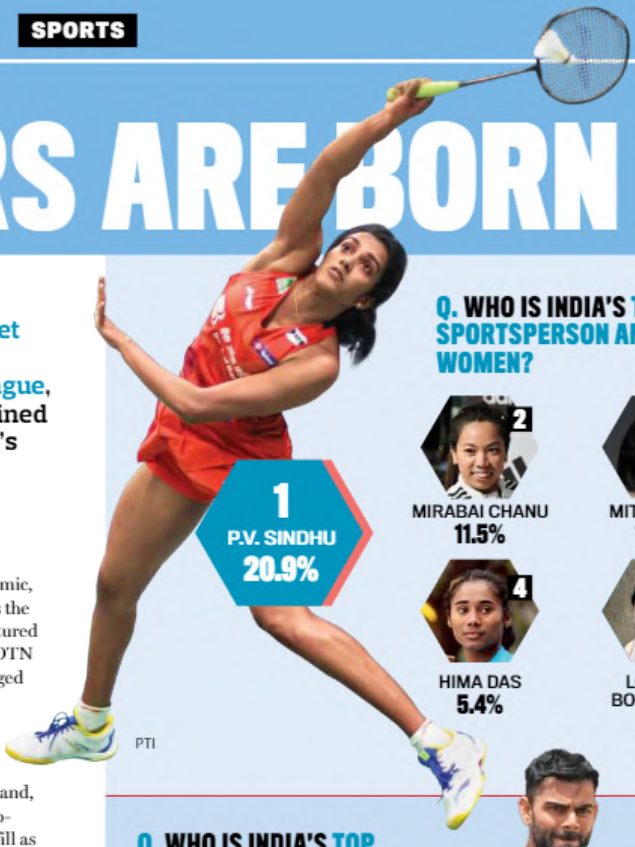
Olympic medalists sneaked into the cricket club in the popularity stakes in the men's league, while P.V. Sindhu retained the No.1 spot in people's hearts among women

By **SUHANI SINGH**

Because of the pandemic, February 2020 was the last time sports featured in India Today's MOTN poll. A lot has changed since then. Virat Kohli resigned as captain in all three formats of the game, leaving the coast clear for the emergence of a new leader and, perhaps, a new sporting star. Whoever that is will have big shoes to fill as India's former captains, Kohli and M.S. Dhoni, continue to hold a special place in the hearts of fans, and at the top of our poll. Rohit Sharma, who took the captaincy mantle from Kohli in T20 and ODI formats, is placed fourth.

Neeraj Chopra, the Olympic gold medal-winning javelin thrower takes the No. 3 spot, a worthy intruder in cricket's domination of the top five slots.

It was Olympic medallists again, who topped the popularity stakes, be it badminton star P.V. Sindhu, weightlifter Mirabai Chanu or boxer Lovlina Borgohain. Sindhu has been the undisputable No.1 in the women's category. Cricket is represented by Mithali Raj at No.3. Raj became the highest run-scorer in women's international cricket and most successful captain in women's ODIs. She will lead her team in March to chase the one trophy missing in her storied career—the World Cup. ■



PTI

Q. WHO IS INDIA'S TOP SPORTSPERSON AMONG WOMEN?

1. P.V. SINDHU 20.9%
2. MIRABAI CHANU 11.5%
3. MITHALI RAJ 10.7%
4. HIMA DAS 5.4%
5. LOVLINA BORGOHAIN 4.8%

Q. WHO IS INDIA'S TOP SPORTSPERSON AMONG MEN?

1. VIRAT KOHLI 27.1%
2. M.S. DHONI 23.3%
3. NEERAJ CHOPRA 11.4%
4. ROHIT SHARMA 10.8%
5. BAJRANG PUNIA 2.2%

PHILL MAGAKOE/AFP

ANI

WALKING THE TALK Priyanka Gandhi at the Shakti Samvaad event in Firozabad in December 2021

FROM GROUND ZERO TO HALF THE SKY...

THE CONGRESS IS NOWHERE IN THE CONTEST IN UP. BUT AT A TIME WHEN CASTE IS THE LEITMOTIF, IT MAKES A VIRTUE OUT OF ADVERSITY: FEMINISING POLITICS WITH 40 PER CENT SEATS TO WOMEN

By Prashant Srivastava

IT'S NEVER A GOOD IDEA TO prejudge an electoral contest. But to the naked eye, there appear only two players in the game: the ruling BJP, and a newly energised Samajwadi Party. Most smaller pieces on the chessboard cohere around these two—a bipolarity that apparently leaves no great room even for Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party. Where does that leave the Congress, out of the reckoning in Uttar Pradesh for over three decades? Well, Priyanka Gandhi, helming the Grand Old Party's desperate search for relevance, has chosen to try and extract virtue out of adversity by sowing a new crop in this tired, old soil.

At a time when everyone is talking caste, she's seeking to get the debate to pivot on another axis altogether: gender. A full 40 per cent of the party's candidates in UP will be women. Quite a bold figure—by comparison, even the demand for one-third seats made in

the ill-fated Women's Reservation Bill seems modest. An attempt to feminise Indian politics on such a scale is a strikingly novel manoeuvre. The AICC general secretary in charge of UP, still only learning to swim in the deep, can't be faulted for her math. Women make up over 46 per cent of the population in UP. Can they be persuaded to vote as women? Over and above conflicting loyalties such as religion, caste and ideology?

This season's harvest may doubtless be slim, but Priyanka has sallied forth on the conviction that these are good questions to ask for the future (*see interview*). The logic is impeccable. Parties have often tapped into this demographic—but only via tactically designed handout politics, "pro-women" policies like prohibition, or plain tokenism. No one has much talked the language of direct empowerment.

That's the catchword in Priyanka's lexicon. To be sure, there's room for it. Quite a few of India's women politicians inherit politics—Priyanka herself, for one. Many of those not born into it are married into it. And then there are celebrity faces in all parties. By contrast, the 50 women in the Congress's first list of 125 candidates include a rape victim's mother, an activist who was jailed for some three weeks during the anti-CAA agitation, an ASHA worker who led an agitation for a raise in honorarium for her vastly underpaid sorority, and a district-level leader who was sexually assaulted during local elections. Remember the names, one might say for effect: Asha Singh from Unnao, Lucknow's Sadaf Jafar, Poonam Pandey from Shahjahanpur and Ritu Singh from Lakhimpur Kheri, in that order. Real women, daughters of the earth who have held up half the sky in a violent society. They join others like news anchor Nida Ahmad, Meerut-born actress Archana Gautam and the party's own flock: Pankhuri Pathak, vice-chairperson (social media) and Mahila Congress leaders Mamata Chaudhary, Shamina Shafique and Shehla Arhari.

The Congress has also released a separate manifesto for women, promising 40 per cent reservation for women in government jobs, besides freebies for girl students, a tactic everyone from Bihar CM Nitish

INTERVIEW | PRIYANKA GANDHI

"Creating a new paradigm in UP politics by giving 40% tickets to women"

The two main rivals in Uttar Pradesh–BJP and Samajwadi Party–are busy stitching up coalitions based on caste calculations. The Congress, meanwhile, has introduced a novel element: gender. Women constitute 46 per cent of the state's population, and the Grand Old Party has promised this segment 40 per cent of its tickets in the upcoming poll. Congress general secretary in charge of UP **Priyanka Gandhi** calls it the foundation for a new discourse that will set the template for 2024 too. Excerpts from an interview with **Prashant Srivastava**

Q. Why has the Congress decided to go 'woman-centric' this election? What's behind the slogan '*Ladki hoon, lad sakti hoon*'?

It's not just a woman-centric campaign. We have many more aspects, including a push for youth, justice for farmers, fight against the backbreaking price rise...and the fact that we are running a positive, progressive campaign. We want to highlight our plans for UP's future, bringing issues of development, health, education, women's rights, benefits to farmers and social justice to the centre of the discourse. It's about time politics in India centred around development—issues that concern and benefit the public—rather than divisiveness and campaigns that thrive on negativity, benefiting only certain political parties.

Q. Why do you think people won't

vote on the basis of caste and religion?
People will mostly continue to vote on caste and religion. I do not doubt this reality, but the Congress wants to challenge it by creating a new paradigm. Women are almost 50 per cent of the population, and by far the strongest political force in the state—in the nation, in fact—if they become aware of their collective capacity to bring about change. Our party is making a beginning, laying the foundation for a new discourse. We are telling women they're the custodians of the future: awaken to your power, join forces, assert your rights.

Q. What was the rationale for giving Unnao rape victim's kin tickets? You also have social activists, ASHA workers.... Will old party leaders keen on those seats support the new candidates?
The reason for choosing such people is to empower them. Political empowerment is the real tool for change. The Unnao candidate's daughter is widely reported to have been allegedly raped by the local BJP MLA, her husband was taken into custody with the collusion of the BJP government and allegedly beaten to death, her brother-in-law is languishing in jail, denied permission to come home to complete the last rites of five deceased kin. Her daughter's lawyer was killed in an accident allegedly orchestrated by the same MLA. Her sister-in-law and niece died in that accident and the rape victim herself would have been left for dead had it not been for statewide protests led by our party. We are telling her—and to all victims of unimaginable injustice—that we will support you to become an MLA yourself. We will help you claim the power used to destroy your life, so that no one can ever use it to trample all over you again.

In the case of other activists and those who have fought similar battles, we are again sending a clear message: we believe the purpose of politics is to serve the public, fight for justice and empower the disempowered. Our party cadres are supporting these candidates in most areas; wherever there are hurt feelings, we're working to resolve them.

Q. Why is the Congress not following the '40 per cent women' formula in other states? CM Yogi flagged this too.
Beginnings such as these are made step by step. Like all big changes, this one too will take time to take hold. Mr Yogi and his party ask these questions not because they care for women's empowerment but because they are afraid of the call to action to women. They fully understand that if women rise and become aware of their rights and powers, they can change the course of India's politics. That's why they have done nothing but relentlessly attack women since we started this campaign, first with the women's marathons, then our Women's Manifesto and now our women leaders and candidates.

They have just released their first list of candidates...there are barely 10 women. They are misogynists with a narrow worldview who cannot, in their wildest imagination, accept women as equals. The BJP's idea of empowering women is handing them one free gas cylinder a year. They want to give them doles, not political space. We are challenging that idea. When it comes to women's issues, the BJP is predictable: it is now attacking one of our candidates using photos of her in a bikini! It exposes their anti-woman mindset even more.

> **THE BJP'S IDEA OF EMPOWERING WOMEN IS TO HAND THEM ONE FREE GAS CYLINDER A YEAR. THEY WANT TO GIVE THEM DOLES, NOT POLITICAL SPACE**

Q. Why did so many senior UP leaders leave, alleging that the "new UPCC functionaries" were not listening to them?
And why should the new UPCC functionaries listen only to them? The whole purpose of revamping the party organisation was to make it responsive to the grassroots. Allowing party workers and a broader local leadership to have a say in the organisational structure and the direction of our politics is essential for the party to grow in UP. For the first time in 30 years, we have an organisation that reaches the nyay and gram panchayat level. We have almost one lakh workers who have attended ideological and practical training workshops, we have cadres that can mobilise for massive rallies and, most importantly, we have relentlessly raised issues that matter to the public in the past two years. In fact, over 18,700 of them have been sent to jail by the BJP government over the past year and a half. It's no longer an organisation where anyone, including me, can randomly insert *chamchas* and hangers-on into positions. It's gradually building itself on merit and representation.

Having said that, different people have left for different reasons. I cannot speak for them. When they were in our party, their opinions and wishes were valued. They also had the privilege of holding posts and being given opportunities many other honest and equally hard-working people in our party might not have got as they lacked the same level of access and opportunity. Perhaps all this was not enough for them.

Q. Why is there no pre-poll alliance this time...are you focusing on 2024?
We are working very hard, have a strong campaign that raises issues that resonate with the public, and are fighting this election with full focus. I do not believe it's a question of either/or...2024 follows 2022. Whether organisational or electoral, the work we do now will provide a strong foundation for 2024 as well.

On alliances, I have repeatedly stated that the Congress is open to working with other parties. Akhileshji is aware of this. I also reached out to Mayawatiji and spoke with her several times. We are, however, happy to be fighting on our own as this will give our party the opportunity to rebuild itself.

Q. How many seats are you expecting in UP? What do you predict for Punjab, Goa, Manipur and Uttarakhand?
I'm not a fortune-teller unfortunately, so I do not believe in making predictions. We are running solid campaigns, speaking up for the right things in each state and hope people respond positively. ■

ASSEMBLY POLLS 2022

UTTAR PRADESH

SPOKES IN THE WHEEL

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

JUMPING SHIP Aparna Yadav with Yogi Adityanath and J.P. Nadda

Last week, the Samajwadi camp had been buoyed by desertions from the BJP. Its turn to suffer some jitters was bound to come. On January 19, Aparna Yadav, the second daughter-in-law of party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav, did the honours by waltzing across the political divide to join the BJP. Even if SP circles downplayed the significance of her exit—hinting at thwarted ambition and a ticket that wasn't—it gives the BJP a chance to spin the narrative of a "rift" in the Yadav parivar. Married to Prateek Yadav, Mulayam's "stepson" via second wife Sadhna Gupta, Aparna is a Thakur-Bisht like current CM Yogi Adityanath. A proximity to the right has often been ascribed to her, so the loss is more in terms of optics.

Less than happy vibes came from another quarters. After talks over seats broke down, Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad distanced himself from the SP alliance. Akhilesh Yadav apparently offered Azad only two seats, while he wanted 10—and a middle ground proved elusive. "I felt Akhileshji doesn't want Dalit leaders, only Dalit votes," said Azad. The Bhim Army's ground strength may be more modest than Azad's iconic stature suggests, but the optics here is more damaging in real terms.

Kumar onwards has employed with success. Just upgrade from a free cycle to a free scooty, and a mobile phone, itself a marker of freedom for young women in rural India.

That's a lot of virtue-signalling, but what purchase will it have in cynical, hard-bitten UP? "We have only one MP and seven MLAs here. We can only gain, there's nothing to lose," says a senior Congress leader. "Our vote share in 2017 was only 6.25 per cent. Now we have created a parallel narrative around *'aadhi aabadi'*—half the population. If we succeed even partially in attracting them, we would have established ourselves in almost every assembly constituency, something we have not done in years." Says a key member of Priyanka's team, "We have divided UP's 403 seats into three categories—'A' is where we have sitting MLAs or which we won either in 2012 or 2007; 'B' is all the seats where we were runners-up in 2017 and 2012; and in 'C', we put the rest of the seats where we can give tickets to freshers/ beginners. We are not cancelling tickets for any deserving male candidate just to accommodate women."

All this goes with a direct call to action. The motto *'Ladki Hoon, Lad Sakti Hoon'* (I am a woman, I can fight) was born after Priyanka met the Unnao rape victim, who said she would never lose hope in her fight against her oppressors. After that, Priyanka decided to link up with other victim families, activists and social workers, motivating them to come into politics. The candidates echo the sentiments. Says Jafar, who got a ticket from Lucknow (Central): "Priyankaji has met so many women like us who have seen real struggle. When I was in jail, beaten and threatened, she came in my support. Her team helps me with legal issues." Says Pankhuri Pathak, who goes up against Rajnath Singh's sitting MLA-son Pankaj Singh from Noida: "They consider it a safe seat... the SP-BSP never put up strong candidates. Now a young woman will challenge him. The kind of confidence it gives is immense."

Scholars feel the Congress has done something that will have a positive spinoff all around. Says Dr Tarushikha Sarvesh of the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies, AMU: "Earlier, parties gave only token representation. This creates hope of changing society's thinking about women in leadership roles—as more than an aberration. It will affect other parties too in the future." Dr Shilp Shikha Singh of the Giri Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow, agrees. "This can change the political discourse beyond UP. It may not bring a significant seat gain for the Congress, but will definitely increase its vote share." Priyanka's team member puts it thus: "Modi once called women the BJP's silent voters. We are hoping they become our vocal voters." ■

A GENDERED APPROACH

The Congress sets its eyes on the other half of the population

150 million Total number of voters in UP

69.8 million Total no. of women voters

WINS BY WOMEN MLAs

TOTAL SEATS **403**

CONGRESS SEATS

Vote share in ( )

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RIVER RAFTING TIME

Harak Rawat is only one name in Uttarakhand's political flotsam. Both BJP and Congress have their hands full with rebellion

BY ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

On Sunday, January 16, when the BJP's Uttarakhand core group sat with party chief J.P. Nadda at his Delhi residence, no one in the room could miss the glaringly conspicuous absence: that of the petulant Harak Singh Rawat, state forest minister. Everyone knew he had been yo-yoing in his loyalties for a week or two—they also knew he was in Delhi at that precise moment. It was all too intolerable for the party leadership, which had already had enough of Harak's tantrums. Then and there, a decision was made to sack him from the Pushkar Dhami cabinet and expel him from the party too for good measure.

Harak had spent his Sunday meeting his old bosses in the Congress in the Capital...hard-selling his idea of a good bargain. That naturally entails a ticket for himself. Not from his present seat, Kotdwar, in the green foothills of southeastern Uttarakhand, but 10,000 feet higher up...from high-prestige Kedarnath! That isn't all. As a package deal, Harak also wants a ticket for his daughter-in-law—Anukriti Gusain, a former Miss India—from Lansdowne, the pretty cantonment town next door to Kotdwar well-known to weekend tourists from Delhi.

Rawat is not the only one to indulge in a spot of political tourism in this poll season. Before him, state transport minister Yashpal Arya too had quit the Dhami cabinet to return to the Congress. In 2016, this very duo had made the pleasant group trek to Camp BJP, in the company of the likes of ex-CM Vijay Bahuguna and Amrita Rawat 'Mata Ji', who was herself only following her godman-cum-politician husband Satpal Maharaj, an earlier emigre. That episode of widespread dissension against then CM Harish Rawat was a major prelude to the Congress losing in 2017. Harish hasn't forgotten.

That's why Harak's move disturbs the air everywhere. His exit does no particular good to a dissension-ridden BJP, besides removing one malcontent. But the weather forecast for the Congress is equally inclement. Harak's prospective entry splits the party into two deeply divided camps. Harish is vehemently opposed to him; his bete noire, LoP Pritam Singh, is lobbying hard with the high command to veto Rawat.

The spectre of rebellion has both sides fairly spooked. The BJP, which hasn't exactly created a sense of solidity with its three CMs in five years, has decided to back the incumbent. Its whole campaign is being evolved around Dhami and his relative youth: he's 46. This means many grizzled veterans among its existing 57 legislators—in a house of 70—will be denied tickets. A top leader told India Today that at least 26 sitting MLAs may have to be replaced. Many of them, sensing the winds, are in touch with the Congress.

The GOP is no Garden of Eden either. After the passing of N.D. Tiwari and his protege Indrani Hridayesh, Pritam has taken over duties at the anti-Harish Rawat group. A temporary truce had been effected between the two, till Rahul Gandhi's return from vacation in mid-January. Rahul duly okayed Harak's entry. But as we go to press on Thursday morning, Harish had not relented.

SPINNING ROULETTE Clockwise from left: Harak Rawat, Satpal Maharaj, Yashpal Arya

In the last six months, a series of decisions have gone against Harish, still the tallest Congress leader here. The high command has persistently parried his demand that he be declared the CM candidate again. Nor are his people being accommodated as district PCC chiefs. As December wound to a close, Harish had even threatened to retire from active politics—the looming re-entry of Harak being the proximate cause. He was somehow mollified, but with no clear overlordship. He and Pritam still make an unstable two-horse chariot.

Both camps have prepared their own list of candidates for all 70 seats. The entry of turncoats feeds right into this. Pritam is trying to consolidate ex-Congressmen who had quit owing to differences with Harish. It was he who facilitated the return, in November, of Yashpal Arya and his MLA son Sanjiv Arya. Now all eyes are on Satpal Maharaj—who's a close relative of Harak. Maharaj, 70, refutes all loose talk but his move may hinge on whether he—and wife Amrita—get tickets. The chances of heartburn there are high, given the BJP's one-family-one-ticket rule. There's a reverse flow of Congress rebels too, but the headwaters are still circling around in uncertain eddies. ■

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BREAKING NEWS

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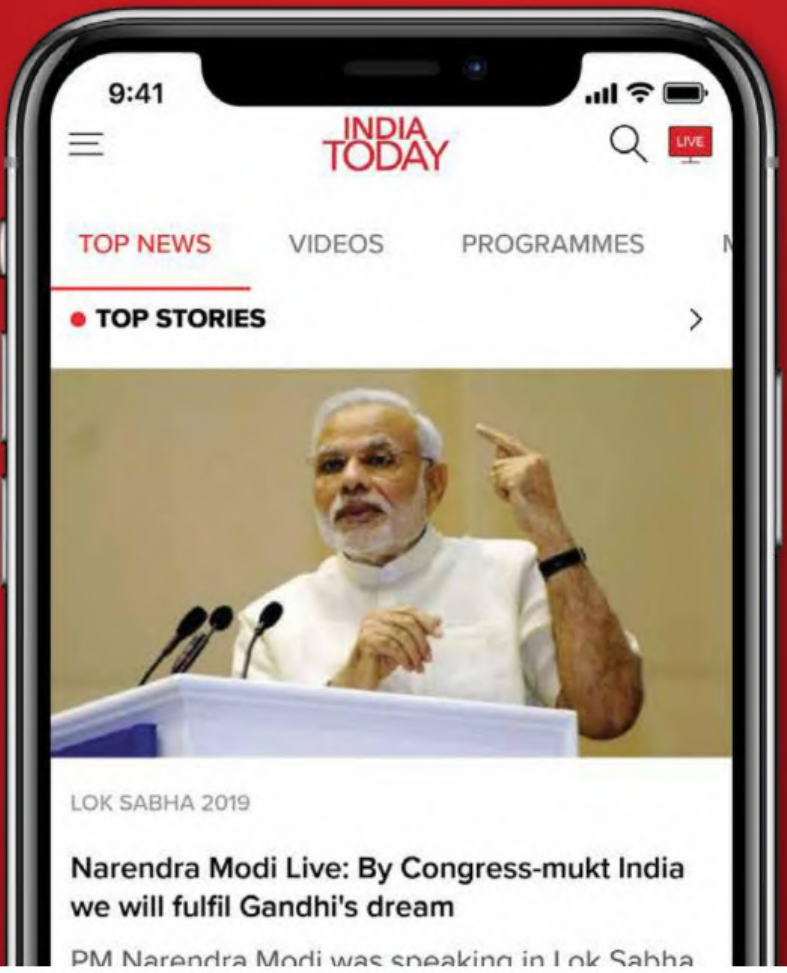

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ASSEMBLY POLLS 2022

PUNJAB

WHO'S THAT MANN?

The AAP fields a comedian as would-be king, but Bhagwant Mann will need some real space to create an aura of leadership

BY ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

A discerning Punjabi voter with a periscope on the world may see a resemblance between present events back home and what took shape miles away in Italy just over a decade ago. Beginning from the mid-'80s, popular comedian Beppe Grillo had been earning quite a cult following with his merciless broadsides against politicians. By 2009, that anti-establishment spirit coalesced into a political party—Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)—that began attracting voters disgruntled with the mainstream. Within nine years, the party gave Italy a prime minister. Minus the last bit, anyone can notice an identical spirit behind India's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), but the coincidence became more striking this week when the party announced comedian Bhagwant Mann as its pick for the chief minister's post. Punjab would have its own Tandoori Grillo.

On January 13, the party launched an online campaign to suss out public opinion—apparently 93 per cent respondents voted Mann. Party boss Arvind Kejriwal was leaning towards him anyway, but it was Mann's idea to put it to vote—a patented AAP tactic critics often deride as a crowd-pleasing gimmick. Mann may not have been aware of it, but Grillo too had popularised his ideas and choices through referendums.

Like Grillo, Mann wove a career around the art of satirical comedy. A clean-shaven Sikh those days, he shot to fame with his 1997 album *Kulfi Garma Garam*. He spent the next few years taking freewheeling pot-shots at politicians, bureaucrats, the police and the education system, spinning out breathlessly verbose send-ups that became especially popular in the Malwa belt. With an ideology inherited from his leftist teacher-father, Mann first joined hands with Manpreet Badal, the conscientious objector from the Akali camp. Alas, that experiment, the Punjab People's Party, flopped. Manpreet went to the Congress; Mann took his folksy charms to AAP. Plunging into the 2014 election hurly-burly as the Sangrur candidate, Punjab saw him for the first time in a turban, its 'basanti' yellow hue derived from none other than Bhagat Singh.

Ever since, Mann's wit-laced oratory has earned its own niche in the Lok Sabha. Back home, the relentless barbs helped keep voters healthily sceptical of Punjab's two heavyweights, Parkash Singh Badal and Amarinder Singh, and their parties. If he dared to poke fun even at the powerful Sukhbir Badal and his wife Harsimrat, the Congress finds to its horror that Mann's verbal caricatures are now deployed by all parties against it. A typical Mann take on Congress infighting goes like this: *"Bittu di Randhawa naal nahi bandi, Randhawa di*

ON THE BADALS

" TV channel te doston... Badal Badal Badal, wadda Badal, chhota Badal, chhoti Badal, bibi Badal.. Aaj mausam kharab hai toh bade Badal, aur saaf hai fir wi Badal"

(Punning on the name 'Badal', which means 'cloud' in Punjabi and Hindi, Bhagwant Mann says: "Friends, TV channels only show clouds...Big Cloud, Small Cloud, She-Cloud, Mrs Cloud. If the weather's bad, it's Big Cloud; even if the sky's clear, it's Cloudy all the time.")

ON CONGRESS

" Bittu di Randhawa naal nai bandi, Randhawa di Bajwa naal nai bandi, us Bajwa di Tript Bajwa naal nai bandi, Bajwa di Sidhu naal nai bandi, ate Sidhu di kisse naal nai bandi"

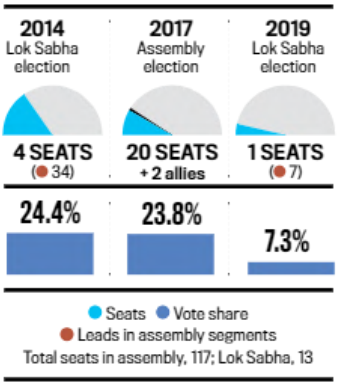
(Reeling out the names of local Congress satraps, Mann piles on the humour with each iteration of the phrase 'X di Y naal nai bandi' –this one doesn't get along with that one– and ends with a classic roundhouse: "...and Sidhu doesn't get along with anyone!")

NARINDER NANU/GETTY IMAGES

ICE COOL
Mann's conservative look today versus his earlier clean-shaven avatar

AAP-HILL CLIMB

Can Mann reverse his party's declining fortunes?



Bajwa naal nahi bandi, us Bajwa di Tript Bajwa naal nahi bandi, Bajwa di Sidhu naal nahi bandi, ate Sidhu di kisse naal nahi bandi." (The relevant phrase is '*X di Y naal nahi bandi*'—this one doesn't get along with that one, and Sidhu doesn't get along with anyone!)

Automatically, through this perpetual poll campaign of sorts, a case was being built up for the AAP. The time too is propitious. The incumbent Congress, worn down by dissension, faces charges of not having done enough—on farm debt waivers, drug trafficking, or the instances of sacrilege. The Badal family is tainted by perceived patronage of the culprits of the latter two, and allegations of corruption at family-controlled gurudwaras. And the BJP is still facing resistance from the dominant Jat Sikh community.

In short, it's an electorate disgruntled with mainstream parties—in times of general financial stress. Imagine its susceptibility to the seductive charms of Kejriwal's freebie mela: Rs 1,000 to 9.9 million women, free power up to 300 units et al. Economist Charan Singh calls it "dangerous populism"—an AAP regime would need Rs 12,000 crore per year just to dole out those goodies. The monthly GST collection in Punjab is only around Rs 1,800 crore, not enough even for the thousand-per-woman, after salaries, pensions et al. But AAP sees this as its moment in Punjab and wants to leave nothing to chance. Debuting in state polls in 2017, the party managed 20 seats, with 23.8 per cent votes. But it couldn't hold on to these gains. Eight of its MLAs quit the party. In 2019, Mann was the lone winner; AAP candidates failed to get even a sixth of the valid votes polled in the other 12 LS seats.

Seeking to reclaim centrestage, the party realised it needed a face—something its rivals lack at present. AAP leaders are already being accused of corruption in ticket distribution. Even if Kejriwal rubbished farm leader Balbir Rajewal's audio evidence, the taint became rather public when partymen ransacked AAP's co-state in-charge Raghav Chadha's presser on similar allegations. Ferozepur Rural candidate Amandeep Banger pointed fingers at Chadha, saying AAP runs like a "multinational company", with Delhi leaders calling the shots. Having Mann at the steering wheel will stymie such talk.

In other ways too, the AAP seems to have learnt some lessons from its 2017 fiasco—witness the care with which it's orienting itself to Punjab's various religious and social sectors, and tamping down on its old tendency to make "shoot and scoot" allegations. (In 2018, Kejriwal had to write an apology to SAD's Bikramjit Majithia for making "unsubstantiated" allegations on drug trafficking.) This time, Kejriwal is frequenting Hindu temples and promising pilgrim buses to Ayodhya, Varanasi and the Hanuman temple at Salasar Dham, in Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu. The party's also maintaining a distance from radical leaders and their narratives. After the January 5 security scare around the PM's motorcade, AAP conspicuously chose to criticise the state government—again, the intention was to not contribute to any Hindu paranoia about national security.

All this relates to Punjab's complex community matrices. The Jat Sikhs have an uneasy relationship with Dalits (Hindu or Sikh) as well as caste Hindus. Earlier, AAP was banking on mobilising Jat Sikhs, backing the farm agitation to the hilt. Post the repeal of the farm laws, and with the Congress putting up Charanjit Singh Channi as Punjab's first Dalit CM, all equations changed. SAD started consolidating again behind the Badals, and Akali-backed unions returned to back its candidates. And Rajewal's farmers' front is taking away Jat Sikhs with left/ socialist leanings—those who once backed the Congress and, in 2017, voted AAP. Retaining their loyalties will need negotiations at the local level: Mann, a Jat Sikh, will be handy.

A counter-mobilisation is unfolding in urban Punjab, but the AAP will find it difficult to scoop up any benefits there, despite its overtures to the Hindu business class. The BJP is their natural choice, and Mann has almost no pull among them. His value lies elsewhere, but he will need more space in decision-making to maximise that. Only according him that stature will allow the party to counter Channi's pro-people image, or the challenge posed by the farm unions contesting on all 117 seats. The AAP has announced candidates in 109 of those, but for the campaign to truly take off, it needs a son of the soil. Post 1984, no one has succeeded if there's a perception of dependence on the high command in New Delhi. Amarinder too always ran his campaigns as a local leader. It's time, then, for some Garma Garam Grillo. ■

ASSEMBLY POLLS 2022

BALLOT BUZZ

MANIPUR

TRIGGER WARNING

A party I-card should be the most natural objet d'art to adorn election season. But when the name on it is that of controversial ex-cop **Thounaojam Brinda**, and the party is the ruling BJP, bet on it stirring a hornet's nest in Manipur. After the visual went viral, the BJP denied her induction—and Brinda stayed tight-lipped too. Last October, she had quit the police force with a fusillade against Chief Minister N. Biren Singh for not letting her go all-out against drug trafficking. Politics beckoned, she said, but her choice of party would be "decided by the people". That manoeuvre ending with a BJP ticket will be an irony more delicious than a fiery Manipuri eromba. Adding more spice is talk of a rift in the family. Her father-in-law is former United National Liberation Front (UNLF) chairman R.K. Meghen 'Sanayaima'. Needless to say, he's not exactly chuffed with this proximity to India's "multi-party democracy"!

UTTAR PRADESH

SA RE GA MA... BA!

One thing about that quintessential Indian spirit: it knows no curfew or quarantine. Last week, we were fretting that the EC ban on physical rallies—now extended till January 22—may take away much of the colour from this poll campaign. We spoke too soon! The festive air that surrounds Indian elections may have been forced out of the public squares, but this is 2022...and even UP's kasbas and mohallas know how to jive online. All parties have turned to music to create a good vibe around themselves. From big stars to local artistes and folk singers, they're all putting out ditties and catchy song videos.

One particular video exchange caught on so much, it made national headlines. The BJP's Gorakhpur MP Ravi Kishan—one of the

RAVI KISHAN: THOSE WHO SAY 'AYE'

"Je kabo na rahal oo ab ba
Je kabo na rahal oo ab ba
Yogi ke sarkar ba
Vikas ke bahaar ba
Sadkan ke jaal ba
Kaam bemisaal ba
Apraadhi ke jail ba
Bijli relam rel ba
Corona gayil haar ba
UP mein sab ba"

NEHA RATHORE, NAYSAYER

UP mein ka ba?
Khatam rozigar ba
Mantri ke bitwa
badi rangatdaar ba
Kisaanan ke chhati pe
rondat motorcar ba
Corona se lakhan
mar gayile
Laashan se Ganga
bhar gayile
Kafan nochat kukur
bilaar ba
ae baba, UP
mein ka ba?

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

biggest Bhojpuri stars of all time—first put out a hip-hop style video aggrandising the Yogi regime's achievements. With the sound of conch shells, visuals of 'development' and Hindu motifs laid on thick, he intoned in his thick, breathy voice: '*UP Mein Sab Ba* (Uttar Pradesh has everything)'. Hours later, Bihar-based folk singer Neha Rathore issued a stinging riposte—parodying Ravi Kishan's words, referencing Hathras, Lakhimpur Kheri and last year's Covid deaths, and asking tauntingly, '*UP Mein Ka Ba* (What does UP have?)'. Actor-singer Dinesh Lal Yadav 'Nirahua' had set things off last September, with '*Aaenge Phir Yogi Hi*'. Last week, BJP MP Manoj Tiwari, also a Bhojpuri A-lister, put out '*Bhagwa Chadne Laga Hai*'. The Samajwadi side is busy too: ex-MLC Ashu Malik and his team have prepared at least five songs, and party worker-singer Chahat Malhotra too is in the game. For every reason, there's a rhyme.

GOA

A Broad Church

It's not usual to see the Catholic segment punching above its weight in Goa's elections—despite its 22 per cent share in a 1.7 million population—but the novelty of a four-cornered fight has made it a key factor for all. The Congress is banking on Michael Lobo and Alexio Reginald Lourenco in five constituencies. The BJP hopes Atanasio Monserrate, Nilesh Kabral, Mauvin Godinho and Tony Fernandes will sail its boat in eight. If TMC is betting big on Luizinho Faleiro, Churchill Alemao and Leander Paes, AAP is looking at Alina Saldanha to open its account. The outgoing assembly had 12 Catholic MLAs—one or two may make the difference between the gold and da Silva.

UTTAR PRADESH

A COUPLE OF ISSUES

A husband-wife squabble over Lucknow's Sarojini Nagar seat has the BJP in a spot. Sitting MLA-minister Swati Singh wants a renomination. Husband Daya Shankar, no pushover in the state BJP pecking order as its vice-chief, wants the seat too. The two have begun door-to-door campaigns within party circles. It's like some old parable: two hungry mouths and just one parantha that can't be split. Maybe a third candidate will run away with the raita.

PUNJAB

DEUCE!

PRABHJOT GILL

Congress bosses seem wary of favouring any of the warring factions in Punjab. So no ticket for the CM's brother Manohar Singh—he's now contesting as an independent from Bassi Pathania. Nor for kinsman Mohinder Kaypee, ex-PCC chief, who may join BJP. Another pet desire of **Charanjit Channi**—two tickets—has been nixed. He retained rights over Chamkaur Sahib, but didn't get to forage out in the Dalit-dominated Doaba region for an image-building second win. Channi's bete noire isn't getting a free ride either. Navjot Sidhu is dying for a CM face to be chosen—preferably himself! But the party wants the full triumvirate in balance: the Dalit, the Jat Sikh and Hindu face Sunil Jhakhar.

—with Anilesh S. Mahajan, Prashant Srivastava, Kaushik Deka and Kiran D. Tare

GUEST COLUMN

PRADEEP MAGAZINE

KOHLI'S LINE IN THE SAND

With Virat Kohli having quit as Test captain, the juggernaut of Indian cricket threatens to halt

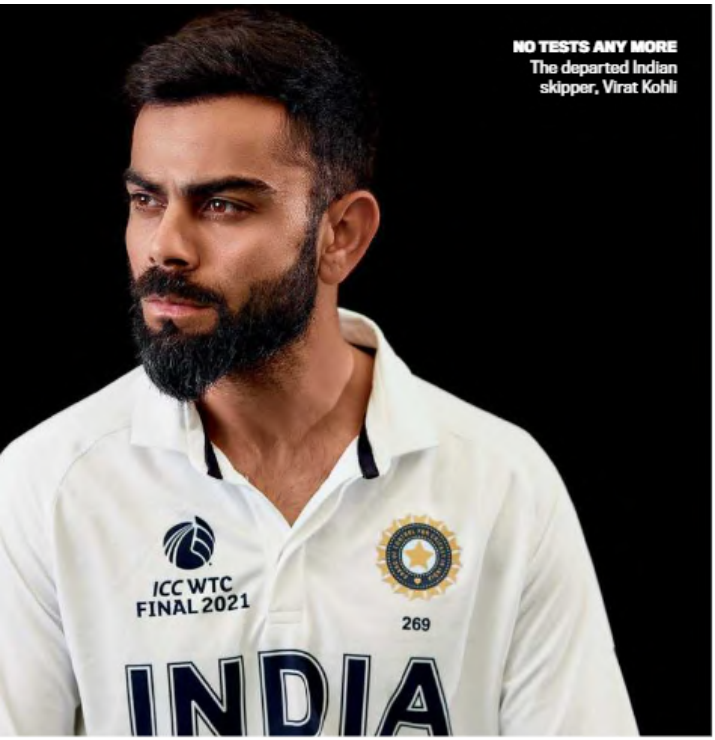
The impact of Virat Kohli's announcement to quit as India's Test captain is akin to the brakes being hit on a speeding train. The screeching sound and the falling passengers create an unsettling effect that takes some time to return to normalcy. Similarly, Indian cricket, too, has been thrown into a tailspin. Not many saw this coming. Having ruled Indian cricket for seven years with a power that seemed unbridled, Kohli, that larger-than life persona, has decided enough is enough. His statement came a day after India suffered a heartbreaking series loss against South Africa, a foe in whose den we had never won a Test series. In Kohli's statement, there was a touch of finality. It reflected his anguish, the pressure he was under, a pressure he seems loath to take on anymore.

In many ways, Kohli's state of mind and bubbling frustration became manifest in his recent, ugly outburst on the field. When the DRS (Decision Review System) overturned the umpire's decision against the South African captain at a crucial stage of the final Test last week, Kohli shouted into the stump mic and accused the host broadcaster of manipulating the ball-tracking system. He had breached a line and ought to have invited a strong reprisal from the cricket establishment. In his long and distinguished career as India captain, Kohli has infused the team with irrepressible energy and boundless enthusiasm. He leads by example, but discretion has never been his strength. As a result, that line of acceptable behaviour has often been crossed.

In executing his plans for the team, a vision that made India a formidable outfit and the world's number one Test team, Kohli had a close ally—former cricketer and television commentator Ravi Shastri. He made no secret of his liking for Shastri, even going to the extent of forcing the Board to remove the legendary Anil Kumble as coach of the team, paving the way for Shastri's recall. And to the credit of both Kohli and Shastri, they did manage to take the Indian team to glorious heights.

Though Kohli's CV as captain was impressive, it did have one lacuna—not winning any ICC trophy. Success in shorter format ICC competitions, including 50-over and 20-over World Cups, had eluded him. This is how the unlimited power of Kohli began to wane. His quitting the T20 captaincy, and subsequently being removed from the 50-over captaincy, resulted in a public spat with the BCCI. But when it came to Test cricket, he remained lord and master. Despite his growing differences with the Board, it is unthinkable that he would have been removed as captain, though the induction of Rahul Dravid as coach was indication enough that his powers were being curtailed.

It is hard to guess what sort of chemistry these two would have developed going forward. The in-your-face aggression that Kohli symbolised is in sharp contrast to Dravid's calm, unflappable nature. It is unlikely that Dravid would have played second fiddle to Kohli's domineering ways and allowed him to control the team like a ringmaster would his circus. One thinks Dravid would have surely squirmed when



NO TESTS ANY MORE
The departed Indian skipper, Virat Kohli

GETTY IMAGES

54.82

Kohli's batting average across the three formats (Test, ODI and T20) of the game

#1

Kohli has the record for being the fastest to score 12,000 runs in ODI cricket—242 innings. He broke Tendulkar's record of 300 in December 2020

68

Tests played under Kohli's captaincy, over seven years. India won 40 and lost 17

2

Years since Kohli last scored a century. While India has never lost a Test series at home under Kohli's captaincy, it has never won an ICC trophy either

Source: espncricinfo

Kohli screamed into the stump mic. He would have felt embarrassed when some of the captain's teammates joined that chorus in a show of petulant defiance. I wouldn't be surprised if Dravid had something strong to say to his players about this behaviour once the team was back in the dressing room. This is not the way Dravid, the epitome of Test cricket's traditions, has played the game, nor would he want his team to be associated with such tantrums.

Indian cricket, one feels, is fortunate to have Dravid in the driver's seat at a time when its speeding train has been brought to a screeching halt. The team may have been thrown into disarray but they have a man in charge who could help skilfully navigate a difficult situation. He has experience and wisdom but also an innate respect for players. He has seen it all, having gone through a traumatic period during his tenure as captain when coach Greg Chappell was needling seniors in the team with his abrasive behaviour. After playing a major role in nurturing the Indian junior and A teams, he understands this new crop of players well. He knows how important it would be to keep Kohli content, especially since he still remains India's best batsman, someone who needs to quickly get back to his prolific run-scoring form.

A new captain has to be groomed and Rohit Sharma may not be a long-term answer, given his age and struggles in Test cricket. The middle order has to be rebuilt—Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane seem to be chasing mirages instead of the red ball. Though India is a strong Test team, with a pace attack that could easily be among the best in the world, it needs a captain who can take Kohli's legacy forward.

INDIA IS LUCKY TO HAVE DRAVID AT A TIME THAT ITS INCREDIBLE MOMENTUM COULD HIT A SCREECHING HALT

Will K.L. Rahul, who has little experience, be the right man for the job? Or will the Indian selectors pay heed to Sunil Gavaskar's suggestion and catapult forward the mercurial and inexperienced Rishabh Pant? There are many questions that Dravid and the think-tank have to address. Fortunately, for them, most of the Test cricket this year will be played at home where India is almost impossible to beat.

The unpredictability of sport, especially cricket, is best reflected in the fact that just a month ago, this Indian team appeared almost invincible. A series defeat against a relatively weak South Africa, as also the manner of that loss, has all of a sudden brought to the surface a vulnerable side of the Indian team that no one imagined existed, at least not when Kohli was leading the side. ■

Pradeep Magazine *is author of* **Not Just Cricket: A Reporter's Journey through Modern India**

OBITUARY: PANDIT BIRJU MAHARAJ (1938-2022)

Raja of Ras

The Kathak stalwart's impact and outreach have been and shall remain universal

By Ashish Mohan Khokar

Brij Mohan Nath Mishra, or Birju Maharaj as he was popularly known, was a genius artiste, a complete artiste. Such artistes come once in many centuries. He could sing, dance, compose, create, choreograph, play various instruments and speak on art. He wrote definitive books too on Kathak *hastas* and *thumris*. Add to this films, or even the ramp walk of fashion—his oeuvre is vast.

Born on February 4, 1938, to Pt Achchan Maharaj, the court dance talent of Rampur's *nawab*, Brij Mohan soon won many hearts and when his father passed away in 1947, he stepped into his shoes to take charge of his *gharana*. His uncles, Lachchu and Shambhu Maharaj, had already established themselves in Bombay and Lucknow, so for a young lad to prove himself and teach at Sangeet Bharati was a challenge that he rose to remarkably. At 14, he had arrived.

His long innings at the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra were significant. He initially took the lead in Kendra productions of the 1950s, undertaking stellar roles in *Malati Madhav* (with Kumudini Lakhia), *Kumar Sambhav* and *Meghadootam*. Later, he lived in a Kendra flat behind the Kamani complex, with other greats of the time, like Ustad Munawar Ali Khan, Guru Mayadhar Raut, Guru K. Shekharan Panikar and Guru Kishan Chand Nayak. This placed him squarely at the centre of all activity. By then, the Sangeet Natak Akademi had created its first constituent body, the Kathak Kendra, to teach Kathak systematically, and Pt Birju Maharaj was a pillar for the Lucknow style. Gurus Sundar Prasad, Devi and Durga Lal were there for Jaipur and, later, Guru Kundan Lal. The history of Kathak Kendra is interlaced with Pt Birju Maharaj, so much so that in the 1990s it was felt that his towering personality had eclipsed other styles. Alas for the Jaipur *gharana*, most of its stalwarts died young.

He did stride high. Look at his oeuvre—memorable dance drama productions for Kathak Kendra like *Shan-e-Oudh* (music by Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and songs by Shanti Vaidyanathan-Sharma), one production on Wajid Ali Shah (with Pradeep Shankar as Wajid) and *Krishnayan*. Films beckoned, like Satyajit Ray's *Shatranj ke Khilari*, for which he created authentic dance sequences, and *Devdas* and *Bajirao Mastani*, in more recent years. He did international tours and had students across the world. Many awards and titles, including the highest civilian Padma Vibhushan, came his way.

Pt Birju Maharaj was not only a pillar of the Lucknow *gharana* of Kathak, but he also made the classical dance form contemporary without sacrificing tradition

His contributions to Indian dance have been many—first, *purush ang*, or the male dance form; second, making Kathak contemporary without sacrificing tradition; third, connecting classical dance to Bollywood; and, above all else, the art of the soloist in his heyday. Finally, a guru is known by his *shishyas* and these are legion, spread over three generations and more. While seniors like Bharati Gupta, Brojen Mukherjee, Arjun Mishra and Saswati Sen absorbed his *ang* most, many benefitted from even a cursory association with him, such was his magic and influence. His own institution, Kala Ashram, has been run successfully by Saswati over the past three decades. His outreach and impact are universal.

JUST A LOOK Pt Birju Maharaj performing the *navrasas* (nine emotions)

Pt Birju Maharaj was a genial, soft, kind man—like Krishna. Lovable, likeable. His ancestral home in Lucknow became a museum, courtesy the Uttar Pradesh government, and his houses in Delhi became *addas* for Kathak. Whenever I dropped in for a visit, he ensured we spent quality time together, discussing art, never him. 'Mithaas' (sweetness) could have been his second name—Birju Mithaas.

India has lost its last giant in dance. It is a huge loss, but wherever he is, his shy, childlike smile is telling us, "I'm busy creating an Indra Sabha in Vaikuntha." The only jewellery he wore was a Sai baba ring. That hand blessed so many. He has merged with his maker. Long live the King of Kathak! ■

Ashish Mohan Khokar *is a dance critic, historian, archivist and editor,* AttenDance

Photographs by **BANDEEP SINGH**

INDIA TODAY RPG Happiness Quest

'The pandemic has taught me to *deeply value freedom*'

VIVAN MEHRA

KIRAN MAZUMDAR-SHAW
Chairperson, Biocon Limited and Biocon Biologics

What makes me *happy*

"Since March 2020, the world has changed in many ways. The pandemic has denied us the freedom of choice and introduced stringent restrictions on work, education, travel and other social activities from time to time.... It has introduced us to a virtual world where technology is playing a large role in our day-to-day lives. We have embraced the new normal and found new ways of seeking happiness in life. The pandemic has taught me to deeply value the freedom that many of us took for granted. I have missed many family events, especially the birth of my grandnephew in the US. Today, what really makes me happy is FaceTiming with my one-year-old grandnephew on a regular basis. And while we cannot hold any physical events, at the workplace, celebrating work-related successes with my colleagues virtually gives me happiness."

Happiness Quest: *A joint enterprise of India Today and the RPG Group celebrating exemplary initiatives to spread happiness*

TIPS FOR HAPPINESS

HOW TO BRING POSITIVE VIBES TO THE OFFICE

VISTASP BHAGWAGAR
Principal Architect, AVA Design Pvt. Ltd, and author of Positivity @ The Work Place

Having practised workspace design for 30 years and written a book on this subject, I can safely say that positivity at the workplace is extremely important for contemporary organisations and MSMEs to ensure productivity. At the end of the day, a good business is one that survives and delivers in the present VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) times. Why would people want to come back to office in a post-pandemic situation? Well, the answers can be best summarised as five fundamental truths which, if ensured, can create a positive and productive work space.

1. **An engaging space:** To make work spaces engaging, the physical environment must allow for better visual connectivity, natural light, views, greenery and good interior architecture.

2. **A great work culture:** As they say, "culture eats strategy for breakfast". It is important that there are good vibes through the organisation, with people sharing similar mindsets, ideologies, aligned aspirations and energies.

3. **An acceptance of WFA**: Investment in tools and technology that allow employees to 'work from anywhere' (WFA) is important. Today, where you are working from is not important, it is more important that the work gets done on time and is of acceptable standard.

4. **The office as a club**: With acceptance of the WFA work culture comes the need to understand that the office is now like a club that must allow for flexibility of space usage. So, make spaces multi-dimensional, versatile, optimised and home-like or 'resimercial'. Technology plays an important role here and needs to be invested in to allow for booking of seating, attendance and meeting spaces.

5. **Understanding how millennials think and what they like**: As per the 2021 Fortune Best Workplaces for Millennial survey, millennials need five things: fair pay and personal meaning; inclusive benefits; gender equality; flexibility; and inclusion in decision-making.

'CRICKET IS INDIA'S HEARTBEAT' PG 65

BOOK REVIEW: *AFTERLIVES* BY ABDULRAZAK GURNAH PG 68

LEISURE

FILM REVIEW: *BEING THE RICARDOS* PG 66

Q&A WITH VIKAS KHANNA PG 70

UP THE DOWNWARD SLOPE

MOHAMMAD ARIF KHAN IS CARRYING ON HIS BRAVE, HARDENED SHOULDERS ALL OF INDIA'S WINTER OLYMPIC HOPES

INDIAN SKIER MOHAMMAD ARIF KHAN TRAINING IN AUSTRIA FOR THE WINTER OLYMPICS 2022

Photograph by KERSTIN JOENSSON/AFP

KERSTIN JOENSSON/AFP

In early February, Mohammad Arif Khan will be making his Winter Olympic debut in Beijing. But even before he steps out on the course, he has made history as the first Indian to have qualified for two events at the quadrennial event—the slalom and the giant slalom disciplines of alpine skiing. It's a sport that features athletes rushing down a snow slope at breakneck speeds of over 70 kmph, while twisting past flags en route to the finish line. Each run is about shedding infinitesimal fractions of time and each run comes down to the performance of your body's every muscle, sinew and twitch.

So, alongside the physical aspects of training, Khan, 31, has also been spending much time tuning his mind these days. "Speed is everything as you rush downhill while at the same time trying to maintain the right movements to stay in line and take on the turns. To pull it off, you have to be very strong mentally, really brave. If you are brave enough, the rest of the things simply fall in place," he says. Khan knows a thing or two about being fearless in the face of adversity. It is what has allowed him to pursue the sport over the past 15 years or so. And most times, against all odds.

Khan wore his first pair of skis at the age of four. The early days were all fun and games, as he spent most of his time at his father's ski shop, one that caters to the influx of winter tourists in Gulmarg. After excelling at local competitions, he made his mark at the national level as a teenager. It was when he looked to further hone his skills that Khan realised just what he was up against. "There was no support or sponsorship because nobody believed in the sport. Ever since, my father would set aside money from the skiing business so that I could pursue skiing. Good tourism meant good money," he says.

Even back then, the dream was to race at the Winter Olympics. However, the regular shutdowns in Kashmir constantly afflicted his training. Besides, skiing is an expensive sport. There were certain years when there were no earnings, let alone profits. Khan supplemented his training on the local slopes with his meagre savings as a ski guide, though travelling for competitions was often out of the question. With few avenues to make a living, his father Yaseen—also his biggest supporter—often felt that a lack of resources would deny his son the opportunity to compete on the world stage. "To be mentally stable to perform in sports was a little bit harder. It's difficult even now. But I continued dreaming because I knew it would happen. I just had to be a little more patient," Khan says.

"SPEED IS EVERYTHING... AS IS MAINTAINING THE RIGHT MOVEMENTS... TO PULL IT OFF, YOU HAVE TO BE STRONG MENTALLY, REALLY BRAVE"

By 2006, Khan started competing internationally as a junior, putting together every resource at his disposal. He started making connections to train abroad, often at subsidised rates. He even managed to race at four FIS World Ski Championships. The Olympics, however, continued to elude him. He was ruled out of the 2014 edition due to an injury. Four years later, a defunct national body meant that most of his efforts were focused on fundraising. Crowdfunding allowed him to race at a few qualifying events, but he eventually fell short of funds and his Olympic dream continued to hang in the balance. "Missing out on those two Olympics was a good lesson for me to prepare early

SKI FEVER
Mohammad Arif Khan has been skiing since the age of 4

and work a bit harder this time around," Khan says.

The pressure was immense at the start of the previous year. At his age, Khan realised that this was perhaps his best chance to make the Olympic cut. He even decided to put marriage on hold after a heartfelt discussion with his fiancé. "She didn't know much about my skiing experience, so I sat down to narrate my journey over all these years and about everything that I have wanted to achieve. I am lucky to have her support and that of her family," he says.

In November, he made the cut for the slalom event at a qualifier in Dubai and the following month, his performance in Kolasin was good enough for the giant slalom. These days, he is being funded by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports as part of the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS). "My efforts are being appreciated everywhere I go. To be included as part of TOPS is one of the best things to have happened for the recognition of my sport. The Olympics is one of the biggest platforms in the world and I want to use it to introduce India as a skiing destination to the rest of the world," he says.

The sense of relief at having finally made it to the Olympics is apparent—he's the only athlete in the Indian contingent so far. That said, there's a constant voice in his head as he hits the slopes each day. "I keep asking myself why I'm here and what got me here. Those are the words that keep me motivated," he says. ■

–Shail Desai

ABHIJIT BHATLEKAR/GETTY IMAGES

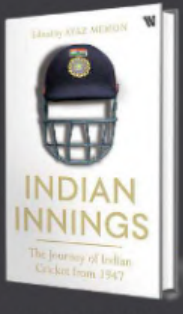
SPORTS

"CRICKET IS INDIA'S HEARTBEAT"

***Ayaz Memon** once aspired to be a cricketer, an engineer, a lawyer. That was all until he discovered his true love–journalism. It allowed him to live the many highs and lows of Indian cricket over four decades. Indian Innings, an anthology edited by him, tells stories of key moments that shaped the game.*

Q. How does Indian cricket reflect the state of the nation?
That cricket is the heartbeat of India comes through in all accounts from the time the British introduced the sport here. From royalty to commoners, across religions and caste (with hardships), vast numbers of people of India took to this highly nuanced sport with an obsessive passion that has beguiled and befuddled social scientists. At a granular level, the Indian dressing room has been a microcosm of Indian life–its confluences and contradictions, its inherent plurality and inclusiveness, with some chinks appearing every now and then, much as in daily life.

Q. How did the '70s shape Indian cricket?
This was a seminal decade. The chairman of selectors, Vijay Merchant, used his casting vote to remove the Nawab of Pataudi from captaincy. Ajit Wadekar was made captain to tour the West Indies and England in 1971. This was thought to be 'Mission Impossible' as India hadn't won even a single Test in either country till then. As it happened, Wadekar's team won both the series, which not only sparked off wild celebrations in India but also gave the country self-belief. The emergence of players like [Sunil] Gavaskar, [Gundappa] Vishwanath, the presence of world-beating spinners–[Bishan Singh] Bedi, [E.A.S.] Prasanna, [B.S.] Chandrasekhar and S. Venkatraghavan–and the arrival of Kapil Dev in 1978 made the 1970s the decade in which Indian cricket came of age.



INDIAN INNINGS
The Journey of Indian Cricket from 1947
edited by Ayaz Memon
WESTLAND SPORT
₹546; 581 pages

Q. How has cricket writing evolved over the past few decades?
In the early years, it was plain reportage. As the sport grew in India, so did the writing. Writers today must also know how to read balance sheets, law, forensic medicine, et al. Cricket has become an industry with strong financial and legal implications, sometimes infested with crime, too. From the cricketing point of view, the writing has become more analytical, and, increasingly in this millennium, data-backed. That said, a lucid piece, well-written, giving the reader enough to chew on, stands the test of time.

Q. What was the most memorable moment in Indian cricket for you? And why?
Watching my first Test (in 1964), which incidentally India won; Salim Durani hitting sixes on demand (Bombay, 1973); seeing Gavaskar break Don Bradman's record for Test centuries (Madras, 1983-84); reporting on Tendulkar's first Test (Karachi, 1989) and last (Mumbai, 2013); and the magical partnership between Laxman and Dravid (Kolkata, 2001) are some that come to mind. But if I have to pick one moment, it is India winning the 1983 World Cup. It made my decision to remain a journalist rather than pursue law. ■

–with Shail Desai

Nicole Kidman starring as Lucille Ball will remind a certain generation of the days when the American comedienne was a regular on Doordarshan

FILMS

HOME IS WHERE THE SET IS

Aaron Sorkin's Golden Globe-winning *Being the Ricardos* gives us an insightful behind-the-scenes peek at the personal and political dynamics behind a legendary TV show of the 1950s

I Love Lucy was America's most watched show during the 1950s. It revolved around the antics of housewife Lucy Ricardo (Lucille Ball) and her musician husband Ricky (Desi Arnaz; her husband in real life): Lucy constantly tried to escape being a housewife and become famous, get herself in trouble, and Ricky would bail her out. Lucille Ball is still regarded as America's greatest physical comedienne, and Desi Arnaz permanently changed the way sitcoms were produced with a live studio audience as the laugh track, the three-camera studio-based production model, and clever product placement. 'Honey, I'm home' was invented here. To have a Cuban front-runner in a family comedy was a first, as was the use of Ball's actual pregnancy as a trope on television. In the 1980s, watching Lucille Ball in *Here's Lucy* on Doordarshan was quite a treat.

Aaron Sorkin, the creator of *The West Wing*, *Newsroom* and *Social Network* focuses his film *Being the Ricardos* (streaming on Amazon Prime Video) on a crucial week in the life of Ball and Arnaz (Nicole Kidman and Javier Bardem)—when they fight Philip Morris for the pregnancy episodes, when communism accusations against Ball were dealt with on live TV, and when papers ran photos of Arnaz womanising.

Sorkin says in an interview that *I Love Lucy* won't be funny today—Lucy's childish incompetence, Arnaz hamming up Latin stereotypes, his rational patriarch, are hard to digest. But Sorkin captures the place the physical comedy comes from—it is precisely because Lucy embodies at every juncture the pressures of gender and the ideal of the American home that there are infinite permutations of tiny failure. The home always won, and domestic conflicts were resolved. To contrast Lucille in real life, Sorkin holds up a black mirror. We see a whip-smart, ratings-savvy Lucille who shapes the writing, who pulled Desi, who signed the autographs before he did, and who got him the role of Ricky Ricardo. But it is also a Lucille who constantly aspires for a home—after work, Arnaz plays cards and seeks the company of other women. The fantasy of domestic contentment thus completes the mirror: while Lucille has agency, Lucy has a home and they both want the other. This may explain why Ball divorced Arnaz once the show ended.

Perhaps out of a sense of justice, the film denies Arnaz a perspective. You see Bardem through Kidman's eyes—irresistible, larger than life. You are in her head when she processes how a scene will play out while it is being written (just these sequences were enough for the Golden Globe win). Despite their conflicts on set, the cast and crew lavish her with support. This, we know, is what Sorkin does best—a central figure with moral authority, and a sense of community around her. For a little while, we too bask in Lucy/ Lucille's story, with the very best of company. ■

–Suryapratim Roy

FILMS/ OTT

GOLD STAR

Golden Globe-winning entertainment you can stream

THE POWER OF THE DOG

Netflix

There are several reasons why this Jane Campion-directed film picked up the Best Motion Picture (Drama) prize. Benedict Cumberbatch is just one of them. Tense, eerie and dark, it's a delight to watch.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

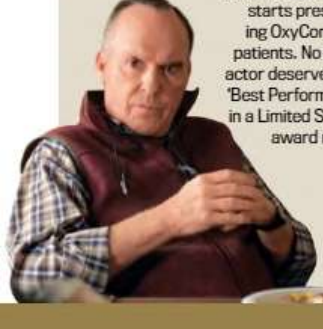
Amazon Prime Video

Winner in the Best Television Limited Series category, this adaptation of Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer-winning novel is both powerful and humane. The show's themes of slavery and freedom still resonate.

DOPESICK

Disney+ Hotstar

In this addictive show about opioid addiction, Michael Keaton plays a doctor who starts prescribing OxyContin to patients. No other actor deserved the 'Best Performance in a Limited Series' award more.



FILMS

Bringing Books Alive

Days before his latest film screens in Rotterdam, **Gurvinder Singh** explains his obsession with Punjabi literature

Director Gurvinder Singh is set to complete his trilogy based on Punjabi literature with his latest film, *Adh Chanani Raat* (English title: *Crescent Night*). Like Singh's earlier two features, *Anhe Ghore Da Daan* (premiered at the 68th Venice Film Festival) and *Chauthi Koot* (premiered at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival), even his latest feature will have its world premiere at the 52nd International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR), being held later this month. Produced by Bobby Bedi, the film will play in the Harbour section of this year's IFFR.

For *Adh Chanani Raat*, Singh returns to novelist Gurdial Singh, whose work served as source material for Singh's first film as well. "I went back to Punjabi literature, so that I could go into the interiority of family life, the land-owning class of the Jatts, and find personal themes in it. Nothing arouses them more than every inch of land they own, and the people are willing to fight and die over it," Singh says over the phone from Chhattisgarh, where he's shooting his next.

At first read, Singh wasn't sure about the novel. "But then I re-read it and realised that I need not be entirely faithful to it. I think I began collaborating with my writers in 2016-17. We cracked a basic breakdown of the novel and then shot right before the first wave of the pandemic," he says.

Singh also elaborates why Gurdial Singh's work continues to fascinate him: "His understanding of atmosphere, space, light, movement, how things change according to seasons, how the inside of a house is different from the verandah...I find it all very Chekhovian."

Having emerged as one of the most assured voices in India over the past decade, Gurvinder Singh has also been vocal about issues ranging from film programming at some of the world's most prestigious film festivals to the lack of nurturing of independent voices by OTT platforms. "A lot of the film programmers don't invest enough time and effort in trying to understand cultures. I realise it's too much work, but even today they are swayed by topics like poverty, social inequality and subjugation of women—these will always be 'hot topics' in India."

He also adds how despite *Chauthi Koot* being one of the earliest Indian films to be acquired by Netflix, filmmakers like him are made to feel 'marginalised' on OTT platforms. However, that might eventually have to be the route that Singh and his producers take to release their film. "Releasing a film in the theatres is an additional expense on top of the production cost and, given the situation, I don't think there is any scope for a theatrical release right now." ■

–Tatsam Mukherjee

Jatinder Mauhar in a still from *Adh Chanani Raat*; and (right) Gurvinder Singh

FILMMAKER GURVINDER SINGH FINDS INSPIRATION IN THE WORKS OF NOVELIST GURDIAL SINGH'S WORKS

HAUNTING HISTORIES

BOOKS

ABDULRAZAK GURNAH WAS AWARDED THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE. *AFTERLIVES*, HIS MOST RECENT NOVEL, HELPS US SEE WHY

The Tanzanian-British author **ABDULRAZAK GURNAH** has written several short stories, essays and acclaimed novels

When the Swedish Academy awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature to Abdulrazak Gurnah last year, they cited his 'dedication to truth'—but this is not truth as an absolute. Instead, as the committee elaborated, 'In Gurnah's literary universe, everything is shifting—memories, names, identities... because his project cannot achieve completion in any definitive sense.'

For even avid readers of Anglophone fiction in India, Gurnah's 'project' is somewhat unknown, though the Tanzanian-British author has written several short stories, essays, and acclaimed novels. *Afterlives*, his most recent book, offers a spectacular entrée into his oeuvre. Set against the backdrop of colonial brutality and repression in eastern Africa (mainly the coastal regions of modern-day Tanzania), the novel follows the intersecting paths of four individuals over the first half of the 20th century. These are people we grow to care about. Their worlds are centred in a nameless town—impossible to locate on a map, but alive in its spaces and characters, the rhythm of its languages, its colliding belief systems.

The novel opens at the turn of the century, in Deutsch-Ostafrika (German East Africa), where the schutztruppe askari, Germany's colonial troops, violently suppress uprising after uprising. The landscape is 'littered with skulls and bones'. World War I is soon to arrive, and the soil

BOOKS

As Happy As Can Be

In his latest novel, Nobel laureate **Wole Soyinka** shows us how Nigeria came to find itself stuck in a cycle of recurring despair

Wole Soyinka, playwright, poet, novelist and activist, has always connected the dots between the colonial presence in Nigeria and the present horrors that plague his nation. The British, as he puts it, go out through the front door and come in again through the back door—though it is not so much the colonisers themselves, but their structures and systems that become inescapable. Soyinka's part in the Nigerian freedom struggle does not blind him to the authoritarianism and deathly religious fanaticism perpetrated by leaders on their own people. In *Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth*, he squarely faces the worst of those realities.

The stories of four men frame Soyinka's satire, and we are never sure whether these men correspond to the "Gong of Four" that long ago spoke in their own code and made youthful pacts. Papa Davina engages in a spiritual trafficking that ties together faith, tithes, real estate and capital into an enormously successful multi-denominational church he calls "Chrislam". Indian

WOLE SOYINKA'S WORK SHOWS US FLEETING BUT PERSISTENT GLIMPSES OF THE IDEALS OF YOUNG MEN WHO ONCE THOUGHT TO FASHION A DIFFERENT NATION

AFTERLIVES
by Abdulrazak Gurnah
BLOOMSBURY
₹499; 288 pages

***AFTERLIVES* IS SET AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF COLONIAL BRUTALITY AND REPRESSION IN EASTERN AFRICA**

will turn dark with African blood shed in a struggle between Europeans. We encounter Khalifa, son of an African mother and an immigrant Gujarati Muslim father, whose decency and kindness radiate through the novel. Two other characters, Ilyas and Hamza, are part of the Schutztruppen—the first stolen by it, including in spirit; the other sold to it. Hamza's experience of colonial sadism leaves him literally and figuratively broken, though he learns German and can read Schiller. He meets Ilyas's sister, Afiya, herself a survivor of abuse, and their tender love story becomes the pathway from trauma to recovery. The novel ends in the 1950s, when their son, also Ilyas, pieces together the lost, grim history of his name-sake uncle.

That act of recuperation stands for Gurnah's own attempt to make and remake past worlds. His gaze can be panoramic and vast, taking in the historical movements that shape individual lives. But it is always attuned to the inner experience of those lives, conveying them organically, believably, vividly—in language that is spare and free of pyrotechnics, but ambitious in its inclusion of Kiswahili, Arabic and German words. He similarly expands the category of 'historical fiction' to make room for the affective and the magical. What we know in the present is always shot through by a past that haunts and eludes us; this is truth as afterlife, a truth that 'cannot achieve completion'. ■

–Mandakini Dubey

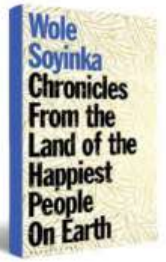
readers will note that the priest was first inspired by the vast domain of Guru Mahara Ji along the expressway leading from Lagos. In fact, many details strike close to home—the faith of the poor in injections over pills, the economic uses of year-round festivals and the declaration of Prime Minister Sir Godfrey Danfere that nowhere does he hear one dissenting voice among the Happiest People on Earth.

Sir Goddie has just concluded a huge debate, with input from his supporters, on whether he should be addressed as the National Servant, the Nation's Serf, the People's Valet, General Factotum or the People's Steward. Once they settle on the most "grassy-rootsy" of these, he is ready to deal with the larger problem of eliminating the renowned engineer Duyole Pitan-Payne, who has inconveniently demonstrated that Nigeria's power shortages can be resolved without help from the World Bank or the IMF. Pitan-Payne is about to leave Nigeria to work for the UN, and Sir Goddie is glad to see him go.

Pitan-Payne's boyhood friend Kighare Menka, now a surgeon being feted by the elite of Lagos at a colonially hung-over club, blurts out to his audience his discovery of an appalling trade in "human resources" that has been sloshing under his nose for some time. It is supplied by bomb blasts, road accidents and everyday killings, and it feeds something far more barbaric than the transplant industry.

Soyinka's prose is dense, broken up by an occasional set piece and intriguing side tracks, the narrative often a bewildering tangle of pathways, like the history of any troubled society. Still, it shows us fleeting but persistent glimpses of the ideals of young men who once thought to fashion a different nation. ■

–Latha Anantharaman



CHRONICLES FROM THE LAND OF THE HAPPIEST PEOPLE ON EARTH
by Wole Soyinka
BLOOMSBURY
₹699; 464 pages

Q+A

OUR DAILY BREAD

VIKAS KHANNA'S 'Feed India' campaign has brought relief to millions during the pandemic. In his new book *Barkat*, the Michelin-starred chef explains what drives him

Q. You are no stranger to writing—*Barkat* being your 37th book. Do you enjoy the process of putting pen to paper?

It is an absolutely amazing way to share our journeys and inspiration, and to document what is happening in the world or what you are going through at a given period. It helps me represent my culture and cuisine and my emotions.

Q. This book pays tribute to your roots, particularly Amritsar. How important has your upbringing been in taking you to where you are now?

Barkat, from its very conception, was supposed to be a semi-autobiography. The values of growing up in a joint family are unlike any education a child can get. I believe that the inheritance of culture comes from your grandparents. Growing up in Amritsar, one of the most important tenets I learned was *seva*. All those values helped me bring together Feed India.

Q. How have your faith, religion and community inspired your culinary journey?

I am not someone who prays every day, but I am extremely ritualistic. Religion inspires me, sometimes keeps me safe. On days when you are out of everything—luck, money, friends, family—it is faith that holds you together.

Q. You named the Feed India initiative after your grandmother's favourite word 'Barkat' (abundance). How much did your family impact this initiative?

My mother inspired me. In the second week of April 2020, I called my mum and told her I won't be able to carry on with this initiative. She told me that she wanted her son to support the country, to stand up and feed India. It's how the initiative got the name. Family is important because they can help you understand your roots and reboot your moral compass.

—with Joanna Lobo

Photograph by YASIR IQBAL

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TIPS TO DECLUTTER YOUR INTERIORS

Art and craft create a visual feast in designer Shabnam Gupta's Mumbai home

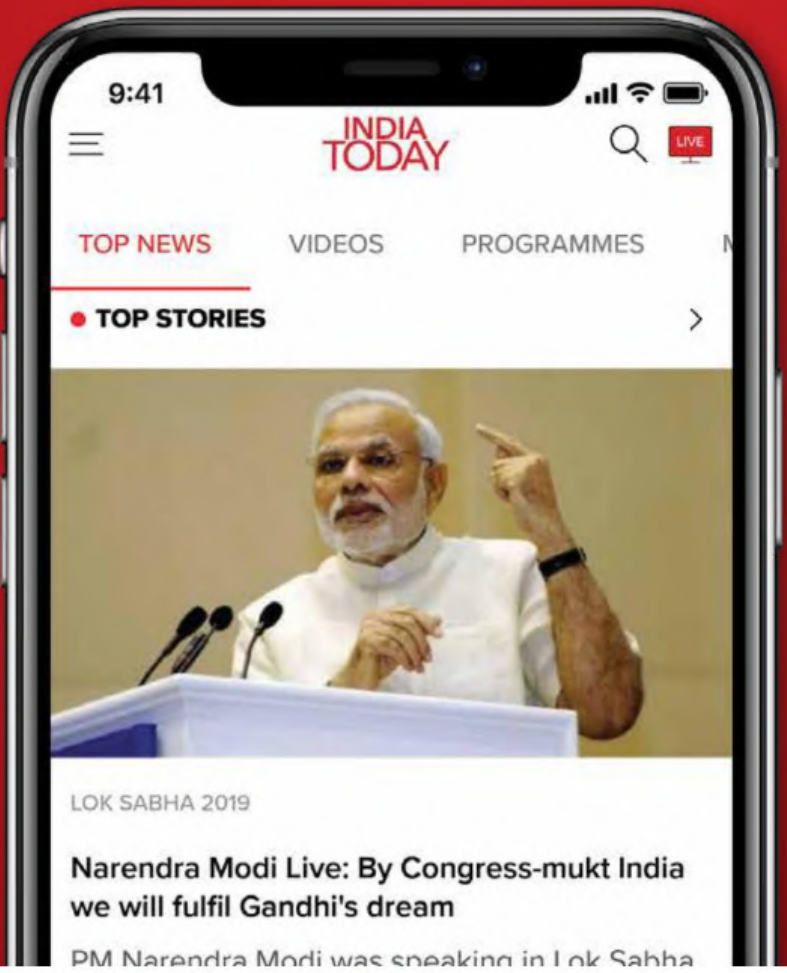
Trend Report 2022

From hues and patterns to decor and design, 10 industry insiders share their forecast for the year

INDIA TODAY

BREAKING NEWS

JUST A TAP AWAY



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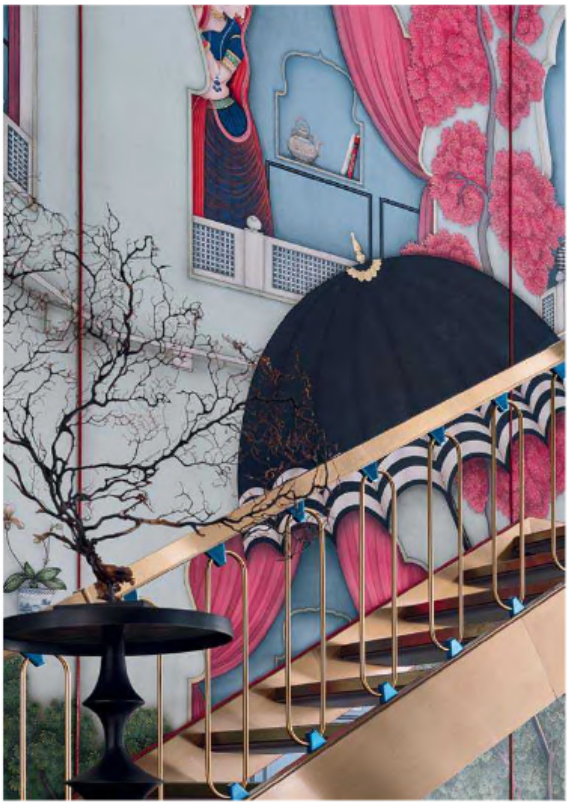

Photograph by ISHITA SITWALA | COURTESY: SHANTANU GARG DESIGN

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY: FABIEN CHARUAU

WHERE THE OLD MEETS THE NEW

Giving local crafts and artisans a renewed voice with an eco-friendly base and a cosy and personalised aesthetic will define the year ahead

By **SHABNAM GUPTA**

I passionately believe in not following the yearly trends as my studio's design is tailor made as per the client's requirements and functions. There should be timelessness and a balanced mix between the old and the new, with a revived habit of collecting art and homegrown antiques.

Continue to be Vocal for Local

We are continuously working to be able to be as local as possible. With the current pandemic, every country is looking inwards I am extremely hopeful that in 2022 we will see a lot of designers from the home and fashion industry looking more and more towards working with Indian craftsmen and artisans. Recreating the age-old crafts in a new language to take it on a world platform.

Crafted for Success

It is easy to bring art alive indoors. Take for instance our bungalow project where we collaborated with lippan artisans from Bhuj to recreate traditional artform in a huge powder bathroom. We also collaborated with thekri artisans from Udaipur to recreate a palace thekri artform in the formal passages.

ART AND CRAFT

(clockwise from left) Walls in this media room display artworks and artefacts from the family's travels; designer Shabnam Gupta; vintage tiles juxtaposed with an emerald carved door creates drama

Photographs by: FABIEN CHARUAU

Personal Paradise

Hiring local craftsman/contractors, trying to procure material suited to the place of the site including trying to add as much landscape as part of our design itself—it is a constant endeavour and can never be enough. Instead of following general trends, the focus should shift to personalised interiors rather than a trend. it is essential to create a cosy home with character and warmth to unplug and unwind.

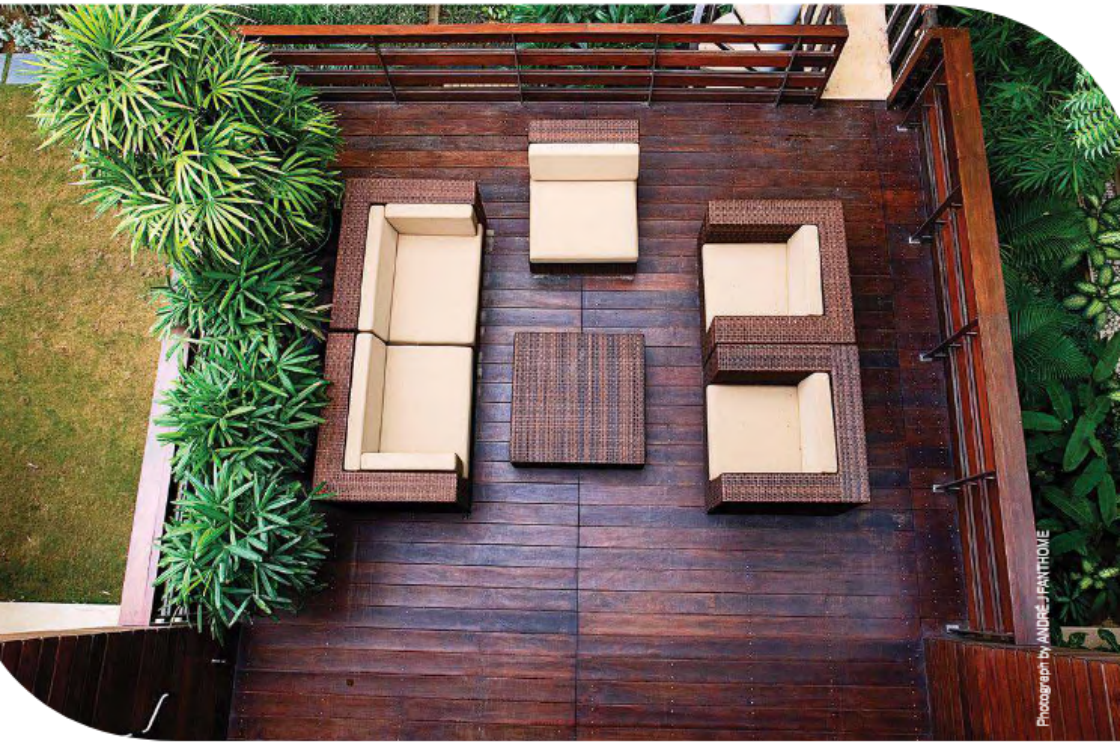
Sustainable Living

From everyday choices to life's biggest milestones, a push for more eco-friendly habits is changing how we live. There is a shift towards more conscious consumption as people re-evaluate their impact. This includes low-waste living, reducing plastic in the home. Further, natural materials are gaining momentum in the trend stakes.

Welcome Warmth

Lastly, 2022 will be the year of sand, warm, earthy tones. Spaces are becoming smaller, and people want their homes to express their personalities through distinctive designs.

Shabnam Gupta is a Mumbai-based interior designer who has designed celebrity homes, restaurants, and standalone spaces. She is also the brain behind The Orange Lane and Peacock Life. www.shabnamgupta.com



ECO CHIC

The pandemic pushed sustainability to the forefront and this year we are only going to see this become bigger and better

By **SONALI RASTOGI**

Sustainability is defined as a project's ability to endure in local conditions and thrive in its lifecycle. Since the onset of the pandemic, there's been a resurgence of sustainability within architecture, especially within homes and residential apartments. The following sustainable trends will be seen this year.

1. Touching the Earth Lightly

Designers, and homeowners, must be cognizant of the site context and microclimate. The local climate must be meticulously analysed by taking into consideration sunlight, wind patterns, rainfall, and average temperature. Local materials and certain vernacular techniques like earthen pot insulation, earth berming, high thermal mass walls, cooling ponds and wind catchers can also be strategically implemented depending on the local climate.

2. Automation and Smart Systems

Once the first layer of passive design strategies is in place, we move towards the installation of efficient and smart M&E equipment. This

Photograph by SURYAN & DANG

SMART SOLUTIONS
The outdoor deck (previous page) in architect Sonali Rastogi's (left) Delhi home; a multifunctional office space (below)

further pushes towards the net-zero target through energy conscious LED lighting, cost-effective heating/cooling systems and a well-integrated smart system that can recognise behavioural patterns and monitor the habits of its end users. The energy demand can further be offset by adding a third layer, that is, alternative energy resources such as solar power.

3. Recycle, Reuse and Replenish

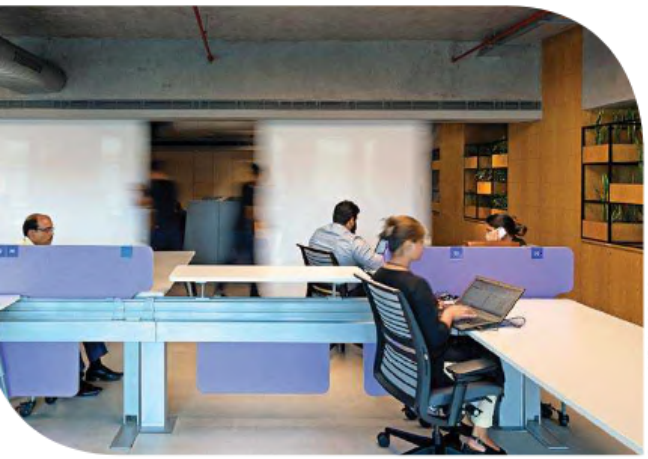
Akin to saving energy, we must judiciously manage water. The idea is to not only reuse and offset one's own consumption, but also replenish the water table. This can be attained by employing rainwater harvesting, low flow water fixtures within homes, and stacked plumbing, along with sensible use of water for cleaning and mopping purposes. Additionally, water can be recycled and reused within the swimming pools and water fountains thereby cutting down the demand for freshwater and reducing wastage.

4. Contributing to a Circular Economy

Additionally, we must ensure that our waste does not end up in the landfill. It needs to be thoroughly segregated into wet and dry bins to ensure that all biodegradable kitchen waste is composted and the dry waste—including paper, cardboard, metal objects, e-waste, glass, and plastic—is recycled and reused. Similarly, garden waste such as dry leaves and other organic matter are also compostable.

5. Multifunctional Spaces and Green Decor

Since the emergence of the work-from-home (WFH) trend, multifunctional living spaces have become a necessity. Repurposing existing spaces and introducing reconfigurable furniture lends flexibility to a design and allows users to accommodate multiple functions within a single space. Moreover, sustainability needs to be practiced even within the decor of our homes and this has been made possible through reclaimed and recycled materials. Technological advancement has now allowed us to upcycle and create newer materials by utilising old, discarded objects. For instance, reclaimed wood, recycled metal, PET, and jute are used across furniture, flooring, and furnishing within homes. Considering the pandemic, sanitisable materials (for instance, linoleum) with antibacterial properties also need to replace the conventional furnishings, and carpets.



Photograph by SURYAN & DANG

Architect Sonali Rastogi is the founding partner of Morphogenesis, an award-winning architecture and urban design practice with offices in Mumbai, Bengaluru and New Delhi. www.morphogenesis.org

FLAIR FOR THE DRAMATIC

India-luxe will shine brighter than ever, but its not just about theatrics, its about how the design brings out a beautiful balance

By **SHANTANU GARG**

This year is all about exploring yourself and giving definition or identity to your own design narratives. This approach of restraint will also be seen in architectural designs. In fact, this controlled, and restrained canvas will also be used to exemplify interior design attributes in a more balanced way.

Design will become more lifestyle centric. During this pandemic we lived in our spaces and experienced its efficiency in terms of usability and functionality. I am always inquisitive to know my clients' passions, hobbies, tastes, and personalities and take its advantage to translate their stories into the design story. Creating a focal point in a room through bars, dressers, a study or a library will be

Photographs by ISHITA SITWALA

Photograph by SIDHARTH PRUTHI

seen this year. For example, developing coffee bars, baking corners in a kitchen, or a well organised and detailed boudoir (wardrobes, dressers, and vanity).

But all this is not possible without collaborations. The year 2022 is going to make us collaborate with our friends from the design fraternity; including brands and vendors to create spaces that are functional and to develop products that are seldom available off the shelf. This will help create bespoke functional objects that define our design skills and research, and at the same time our client's stories.

The design may be dramatic or calm, but the most interesting attribute will be how it responds to the user and how engaging it is. Being a maximalist in my interior design practice I feel that instead of making my spaces maximal and dramatic I would like to make my products more flamboyant and colourful visually and place them in restrained environments to strike a dramatic balance.

The idea is to project our country's luxurious style and raise the bar beyond ethnicity and create environments that are called bespoke, luxurious, and most importantly Indian. It's time for design to revisit our royal history and understand how we used to get custom designed products and curiosities from all over the world with Indian attributes.

Shantanu Garg is an interior designer and founder of Shantanu Garg Design, based out of Dubai, Jaipur and Pisa (Italy). He is known for his maximalist approach and custom-made, luxury habitats. @shantanugargdesign (Instagram)

HIGH IMPACT

Shantanu Garg (top right) creates drama in this Jaipur home using pieces from Shantanu Garg Design (SGD); in the dining you will find custom kaleera chandelier and leather boiserie wall panels from SGD (extreme left); in the living room the carpet he designed in collaboration with Jaipur Rugs sits next to a coffee trunk unit custom made by Trunks Company, Jaipur (above); while in the bedroom Maghreb bed by SGD complements the old kerosene pendant lamp electrified by Taherallys (left)

Photograph by: RAJWANT RAWAT

DESIGNED FOR **WELLBEING**

Spaces that are as much about the inhabitant's health and happiness as they are about the design and architecture will be in the forefront

By **AKSHAT BHATT**

In the coming years we are going to see a renewed focus on our physical and mental wellbeing.

Designs that prioritise physical wellbeing are those that are designed sustainably. I hope to see spaces designed to minimise VOC (volatile organic compounds) emission and indoor pollution. This implies energy-efficient buildings that encourage compact, sustainable environments.

There is also a need to create positive and optimistic spaces that enhance the user's sense of mental wellbeing.

STUNNING SPACES

(clockwise from left) At the East India Hotels Corporate headquarters, the central glass courtyard is the heart of the workspace; exteriors of a residence at Palm Avenue; the design of this home employs a flexible open plan, using expanding and contracting volumes to create differential experiences

Photographs by: JEETN SHARMA

The levels of richness that can be achieved by understanding what a space is and what it brings to the wider community is truly remarkable. Design can be used to break down hierarchies, and to create environments that encourage collaborations. I expect designers to embrace clean, well-lit, flexible spaces that are well-engineered, and styled. Well-lit, well-serviced spaces allow inhabitants to think clearly and live healthily. Good design brings joy to the people who use it.

Modern buildings are like evolutionary environments—work, leisure and domestic activities are increasingly becoming interchangeable, leading to the creation of open-ended, flexible spaces. Architecture does not begin and end with the building; rather, it creates frameworks within which our lives unfold. As users and their sensibilities change, so should our spaces—robust and flexible, they must be designed to adapt to the evolving needs of the people who use them. This approach accounts for product life cycles and serviceability, resulting in buildings and interiors that are designed for longevity and programmed for change. The essence of these spaces lies in the positive and liveable environments that they foster: capturing light, air, and a sense of optimism for the future.

A trend that I would like to see in the coming year has to do with our patterns of consuming resources. The current rate of consumption is quickly depleting our natural resources at a pace that will make our planet uninhabitable soon. We need to evaluate what is truly essential for sustenance and consider the entire lifecycle of the resource—where it goes once it is discarded and whether it has any potential for reuse or regeneration.

A trend that I would not like to see is a return to traditionalism. I think it is a sloppy way of thinking. I can appreciate a letter written in verse, that does not mean I'd ever think of writing a letter like that today. Design needs to address the present and accommodate the future. We need to try and improve the world by doing new things.

Akshat Bhatt is the principal architect at Architecture Discipline, a multi-disciplinary practice based in Delhi. Its work spans from residential and retail interiors to large-scale public and commercial assignments.
www.architecturediscipline.com

PRIORITISE **PERSONALISATION**

Ditch fads for designs that bring you joy while reflecting your taste and personality

By RASEEL GUJRAL ANSAL

t's no secret that I don't believe in trends. Trends are the universal denominator that cut across the design. Good taste can become the enemy of creativity. To have eclectic taste is what is original, otherwise we are living in the same cookie-cutter environment. This year, find a way to personalise your space, journeying within for inspiration.

Travel Inspired

As we move into year three of the pandemic, our world around us has changed and so have our homes. Towards the end of 2021, going into 2022 I thought of doing an Arm Chair Traveller soft furnishings collection because it is something you can easily bring into your life. The same holds true for accent pieces of furniture, whether it is a small side table or an accent chair or a daybed. These pieces along with cushions and other furnishings is how you bring flavours of places you would like to be in but currently cannot travel to. When the roads are blocked, and the world is shut-in, creative minds travel through thoughts. The Arm Chair Traveller collection finds definition in travel. Afghanistan's Serapi carpets lead to the Serai range, Sherpa collection is an ode to Tibet, while Art Deco became the focus of the Gatsby collection. The state of mind is to travel within; and when you are travelling within, then there's no limit to dreaming.

SPOILT FOR CHOICE
Raseel Gujral Ansal (top left); Art Deco range (above); Sherpa range (below left and top right), all part of the Arm Chair Traveller collection

Know Yourself

It's very important to understand what excites you, be it colours, patterns or art. It doesn't matter what the price tag is. Your personal environment should give you joy. It should be something which you feel you would like even 15 years later. It's not faddish, you might not have it in the same position, you might move it to a less or more prominent position, but it will always have a place in your home. Personalise your space and have confidence in personal tastes and values.

Gloss and Glamour

This never stopped. Inherently, the cultural belt that we belong to, we are ornamental people. We do not lack any desire for glitz, and we will see this in the form of rich tapestry, wonderful wallpapers, patterns, colours, and materials this year.

Less is Not More

A trend that has should not be seen this year is definitely—minimalism. It has been overdone and something which should have been left behind five years ago.

Raseel Gujral Ansal is an interior architect who is also the co-founder of RGA, Casa Paradox and Casa Pop. www.casaparadox.com

TIME TO **REFRESH**

Make your interiors stand out with these four easy but effective trends for the year

By VINITHRA AMARNATHAN

Bold, bright, and beautiful—these three words define the design trajectory for the year ahead. Boundaries will be blurred between casual and formal, outside and inside, dramatic and sober. Still confused? Here are top four trends for 2022 seen through the lens of a recently completed home in Bangalore.

1. Warming up to colour more than ever Since we are spending more and more time at home, spaces are becoming warmer, cosier and colour is making a big comeback. Not pops of colour, but an explosion of colour. From warm blues and greys to olives and rusts saturated colour is filling up spaces.

2. Multifunctional spaces are the new heroes With family living, learning and working from home spaces have evolved to become multifaceted. In this apartment we designed a home office space that doubles up as a library and lounge and is outfitted with a built-in bar for when you seek some downtime.

3. Bedrooms and private spaces are evolving into areas of refuge and calm Now more than ever bedrooms are becoming spaces of refuge; beyond a space to just go in and sleep, they are becoming spaces where we want to find to retreat. Reading nooks, loungers, sitting areas are all becoming an important part of our private spaces. Take for instance the bedroom featured here. It is a picture of calm inspired by the client's love for the beach and brings in a coastal-chic vibe. The rich ochre lounger in the corner offers just the right spot to retreat to.

4. Biophilic living The need to connect with the outdoors is another trend we are seeing and we absolutely love it. As a design studio connecting the indoors and the outdoors has always been important to us and a large part of all our designs echo this sentiment.

Vinithra Amarnathan is an interior designer and the founder of Weespaces, a Bangalore-based boutique design firm. www.wee-spaces.com

Photographs by SHAMANTH PATIL

IN STYLE

(clockwise from far left) Designer Vinithra Amarnathan; family room is enveloped in a warm grey tone; the master bedroom is a large space that has a relaxed coastal chic vibe and a beautiful ochre lounger; adding tall plants in the living room is one of the ways to bring in nature

CLEAN, CALM AND **CREATIVE**

White with pops of colour, lots of indoor plants, decluttered design and natural elements will be seen this year

By **KUMPAL VAID**

The year 2022 is all about hope and happiness, and design will reflect this. Confused how to incorporate this indoors? I'm going to use examples of two Mumbai-homes—Shibui House and House No.7 to illustrate how.

Clutter-Free Spaces

The trend is to keep spaces decluttered. For instance, we incorporated soft edges in the Shibui house whereas, in House No.7, no such detailing element was used. So more than clean lines, it's about

Photographs by ISHITA SITWALA

SUBTLE HINTS
In these two Mumbai homes House No.7 (left) and Shibui House (below and far left), designer Kumpal Vaid (above) has used clean lines, wood, plants and white with pops of colour to make the interiors stand out

keeping things very decluttered and Zen like. Both the homes' interiors are heavily layered, but it's also tonal in terms of texture and hues which makes it very calming, open and airy.

White Scheme With Pops Of Colour

For House No.7, the clients wanted to see dominance in space but in a subtle way. They wanted to use materials like rose quartz and mother of pearl to create a distinctive vibe for their home. Hence, the aesthetic gravitated towards luxurious interiors but incorporated in a subdued manner leading to the use of white with a pop of colour. They wanted the space to feel open and airy with a mix of elements used in a subtle way. One common theme in both Shibui house and House No.7 is that the spaces are inspired by nature. Both the interiors were done during lockdown hence a strong connection with nature was important for both the spaces. Even the colours we used are nature-inspired such as tones of white, green, blue, terracotta, use of Jaisalmer stone.

Keep Knocking on Wood

We love using wood in its natural form like in House No.7 we have used chic mirror decor, wood on the ceiling to add a country home vibe. For Shibui house, we used teak wood but in its natural form. So whenever we use wood, we try to retain its character.

Plants Make People Happy

Greens are a classic element in interiors—they add a pop of colour and make the space feel closer to nature. Indoor greens will always be an integral part of our spaces. For me, adding greens is not just a theme or style but an intangible aspect of designing interiors.

Kumpal Vaid is the founder and design principal of Purple Backyard, a Mumbai-based interior design and visual merchandising studio. www. purplebackyard.com

CREATIVE CALLING

(clockwise from top left) Aparna Kaushik; vintage inspired bedroom suite; a cabana-like space; nature meets architecture in this project

TIMELESS TALES

It's no longer about following fads and looking for temporary quick fixes, the architecture trends for the year 2022 are all about enduring style

By **APARNA KAUSHIK**

Photographs by CHITVAN MATHUR

A new year that brims with buoyance of fresh starts, architecture and interior design trends collectively endured after almost two years of commotion have a lot of familiarity in the future. Architecture and interior design are becoming less about what is the latest trend and more about what is timeless and has more personal expression.

INSPIRED VINTAGE

Consumers' love affair with soothing greens and blues and earthy tones continues, but it's not necessarily simply a case of aesthetic preferences. A juxtaposition between the vintage and modern is becoming more desirable than ever. Fabrics and furnishings that reflect silks, floral and vintage textures are increasingly trending. Soothing fabrics and pastels of greens and blues continue along with natural colour schemes that increase creativity and reflect optimism. Since Covid hit, the entire world's way of living has shifted and there has been a stronger desire to find fun and the joy of the past in our homes. Much like the precept old is gold; vintage prints and textiles belong to an era that is valued and is an asset especially in interiors.

SPACES DRIVEN BY NATURE

Being locked up indoors for a long time has now made people to step out and enjoy being in nature more than ever. People are now connecting with more open spaces like floor to ceiling windows, indoor garden areas that create an indoor-outdoor association. Multi-functional spaces with access to daylight and views for the outside will remain a key trend for the year to come.

CABANA SPACES

Having a space that brings people out of their living rooms and come up with ways to bring the outdoors in is getting a lot of importance. Contemporary conservatories, cabanas, and sunrooms next to the pool areas like miniature greenhouses inspired from classical designs is something that is getting a lot of focus. A garden inspired room with fireplace mantles inviting sun with patterned walls, and various textures is the place one wants to be.

Architect Aparna Kaushik is the founding principal and design director of Delhi-based Aparna Kaushik Design Group that specialises in luxury homes. www. aparnakaushik.com

PURPLE PLAY

Dress your space in this trendy hue for the year as we tell you how to break the colour code

By **KRSNAA MEHTA**

Once again, Pantone wowed the world with their choice of Colour of the Year 2022. Called Very Peri, this purple hue is joyful yet dramatic. It's no secret that purple is the colour of royalty, and with undertones of blue and red, it holds characteristics of all our classic favourites. In the past year, our worlds have been uprooted from the normal we once knew, and Very Peri does a perfect job in celebrating newness and confidence for the upcoming year. The alluring shade can be incorporated in our daily lives in many inspiring ways.

Owing to the calming effect of the periwinkle blue, Very Peri can instil tranquillity and make any room pop by using it as a wallpaper. Accompanied by a muted beige couch and gold legged glass tables, it would make any head turn. The wallpaper can also be painted on, using other colours that complement the shade of purple to add a personal touch to the room. Similarly, the colour can also be used alongside other shades of purple. While slightly more daring, two adjacent walls can be transformed with one in a darker, Very Peri shade, and one hosting a lighter lilac for fresh contrast effect.

Photographs by: MANDAR DEODHAR

HUE KNEW

Very Peri inspired wallpaper (left) in Krsnaa Mehta's (below left) Alibaug home; purple-blue pieces from India Circus (below)

If colourful wallpapers aren't for you, statement pieces in the bold colour like a funky armchair, pillowcases or curtains in an otherwise muted room never fail to impress. Art pieces are always a house favourite and collecting some pieces in this new colour will add a modern look to your room.

From muted whites to saturated blues, bright yellows, bubble-gum pinks and natural greens, Very Peri can be combined with numerous hues to achieve enticing looks.

You can incorporate Very Peri in your dining area for a playful, yet chic look by using it as table placements under classic white plates, or simple candle holders on the table for a pop of colour.

Coasters or table napkins in the hue can add a fresh look to the room while keeping it minimalistic.

Since first impressions last, you can even include Very Peri at the entrance of your house by using it as a part of your statement doormat to welcome guests.

Combining Very Peri with bold saturated colours will help create an electrifying palette that will immediately grab anyone's attention. It can also be integrated with softer colour palettes for a colourful, chic and sophisticated look.

Krsnaa Mehta is the founder and executive director at India Circus, a Godrej & Boyce Venture. The designs are inspired by the rich culture and tradition of India with a contemporary twist. www.krsnamehta.com

ROOM TO GROW

Small in size, but big on style. A look at the top five design trends for nurseries in 2022

By **ROMILLA TEWARI**

A nursery where a child will eat, sleep and play. A place where they will learn and unwind, and one that must grow with them, while accommodating all their needs. Let's take a look at the top trends for the year for this very special space.

LITTLE LEAGUE
(clockwise from far left) Romilla Tewari; an ocean-themed wall with matching chest of drawers; a floral wallpaper ties this nursery together; an imaginative room with the world map and playful hues

1 We are no longer seeing any specialised characters like superheroes or themes in children's rooms. Therefore, spaces are becoming more and more gender neutral, Traditional barriers between the genders are being dissolved to bring in a unisex style of decor.

2 Popular themes to bring the great outdoors into the house, are those of floral, trees, nature/jungle-inspired ones, which are serene, calming, and whimsical. Star and sky themes are also very popular with crescent moons, stars, planets, clouds, and suns making great visual icons for children, and encouraging curiosity about the outside world.

3 Neutral colour palettes are in because they give a cool and classy laid-back look. Traditional barriers between the strong colours are being dissolved to bring in a muted style of decor. A strong, vibrant colour may be used in many shades and highlights, to make one think beyond pink for girls and blue for boys.

4 The years of the pandemic have brought privacy and functionality of spaces in focus. Dedicated study and play areas have become very important in the wake of online learning and work-from-home. A common area of engagement and play space, done up creatively, can be a source of pleasure for all members of the family. Functionality and privacy, therefore, go hand-in-hand, and with space being at a premium, the planning of it becomes crucial, especially when parents and children alike are using the same space for study, online work, and play.

5 Polka dots, stripes, vintage wallpapers, and wooden furniture, look classy and elegant. Warm tones in the colours around you, like coral, cadmium yellow, azure blue, and sunset orange instil a sense of cosiness and shelter.

Romilla Tewari is the founder and creative director ThinkCutieful, a design services and e-commerce brand, based out of Delhi. www.thinkcutieful.com

Photographs by: DEEPAK AGGARWAL

DECLUTTERING BASICS

It's time to tidy up, remember nothing can beat a clutter-free and organised home. Here's how to get started.

By SHELLY ANAND

Little did Marie Kondo know that her simple motto 'sparks joy' would lead to a revolution. For those living under a rock, Kondo is a Japanese organising consultant, TV show host and author; and her KonMari Method has helped declutter homes across the globe. But, how to discard excess clutter and the accompanying emotional baggage, especially in areas such as the living room, bedroom, kitchen, and den? Five experts decode the rules for us.

Gayatri Gandhi

Founder, Joy Factory

Declutter must come before organising. As the living room is frequented by all family members, categorise all the items. Apply the C2S2 approach—collect, choose, scrap, store—after that as it will help in tidying up. One of the quickest ways to keep an organised living room is to make use of double duty furniture. Whether it's an ottoman that opens up to store throws or extra cushions or a chest/coffee table for stowing away your children's toys, make every piece count. Tidy up crawling wires and electrical cables. Tying them up with velcro tapes, threads or insulated cable covers looks neater. Don't forget to toss them in a beautiful basket once done. Pick up all the clutter at the end of the day. Take a walk through the room as one of the last things you do at the end of the day, pick up everything that doesn't belong, and put it away.

Pritika Singh

Founder, Mohh and

Barkha Kathuria

Head - Interior Styling, Rosabagh Studio

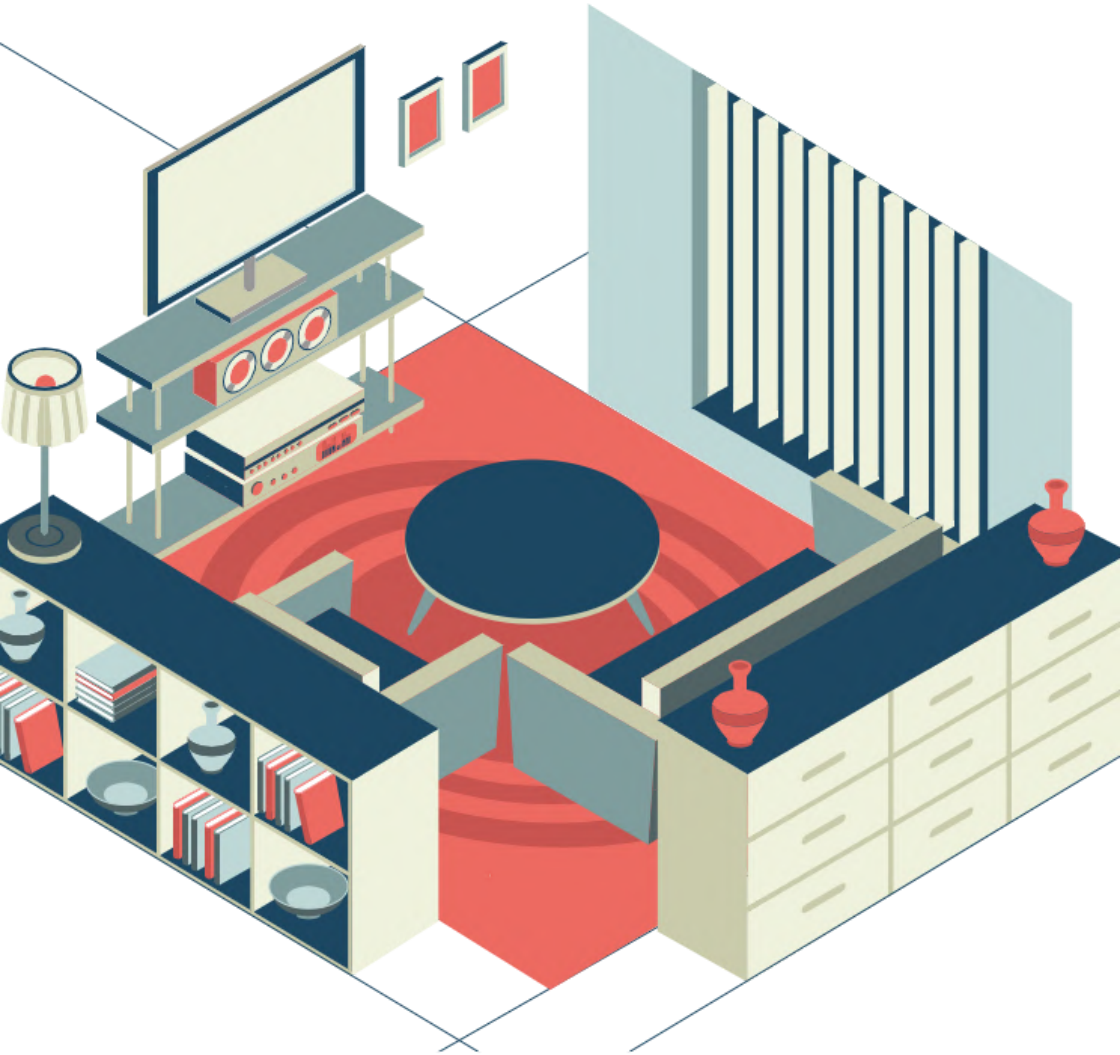
In the bedroom there are some items you use daily and others infrequently. Divide the space into easy to access high traffic areas, which can have everything stored that you need on a daily basis, and a low traffic area neatly organised, which stores items that you access once in a while, suggests Singh. Two rows of cushions which can be neatly stacked away when not in use, trays and organisers that are aesthetically pleasing as well as functional and at least 40 per cent empty space will give your bedroom a decluttered look, she adds. Kathuria, however, recommends to buy a bed with storage drawers, especially on the outside, as that will help keep the area clean and clutter-free.

Saloni Khosla

Head, Spatial Design, Pepperfry

When it comes to keeping the den clean and clutter-less, stick to multi-functional furniture. Oversized furniture should be a big no as it will only make the space look cramped. A coffee table or sofa with built-in storage is your cue and you can stack away your books or charging cables and non-essentials in that storage space when not in use. Opt for sleek wall shelves to display your memoirs, frames, and curios. Overlooked corners and empty spaces above your wardrobe or cabinet can often prove to be surprising yet useful storage spaces. Use transparent boxes to store your old paperbacks, toys, or seasonal clothes. Stack them up and use the complete square metre to optimally use the space. Keep a dedicated clutter drawer.

Illustration by RAJ VERMA



Rohini Rajagopalan

Founder, Organise with Ease

The best way to declutter the kitchen is by starting to literally shop within the space. If you have to recreate your kitchen, ask yourself what you would like to own and pick out only those items to keep. It's a process of choosing what you need than looking at what you can discard. Every kitchen is different and there can't be a defined must-have list as it depends on an individual, the family size, and the lifestyle. The kitchen should not have crockery or utensils that are not in use and electronic items such as toaster, mixer, and blender that are not functional. To organise a kitchen, it's important to categorise items in these zones—appliances, cookware, serveware, grocery and snacks. Items when grouped together work better. They have a defined space, and you have a sense of how much you own and where exactly things are. Editing your kitchen often and putting back things in their space is the key to an organised kitchen. And keep surfaces as clear as possible.

POETRY IN STONE

The stark simplicity of farm life juxtaposed with a complex architectural narrative forms the inspiration for this minimal home in Karjat

By **KAYZAD RUMY SHROFF AND MARIA ISABEL JIMENEZ LEON**

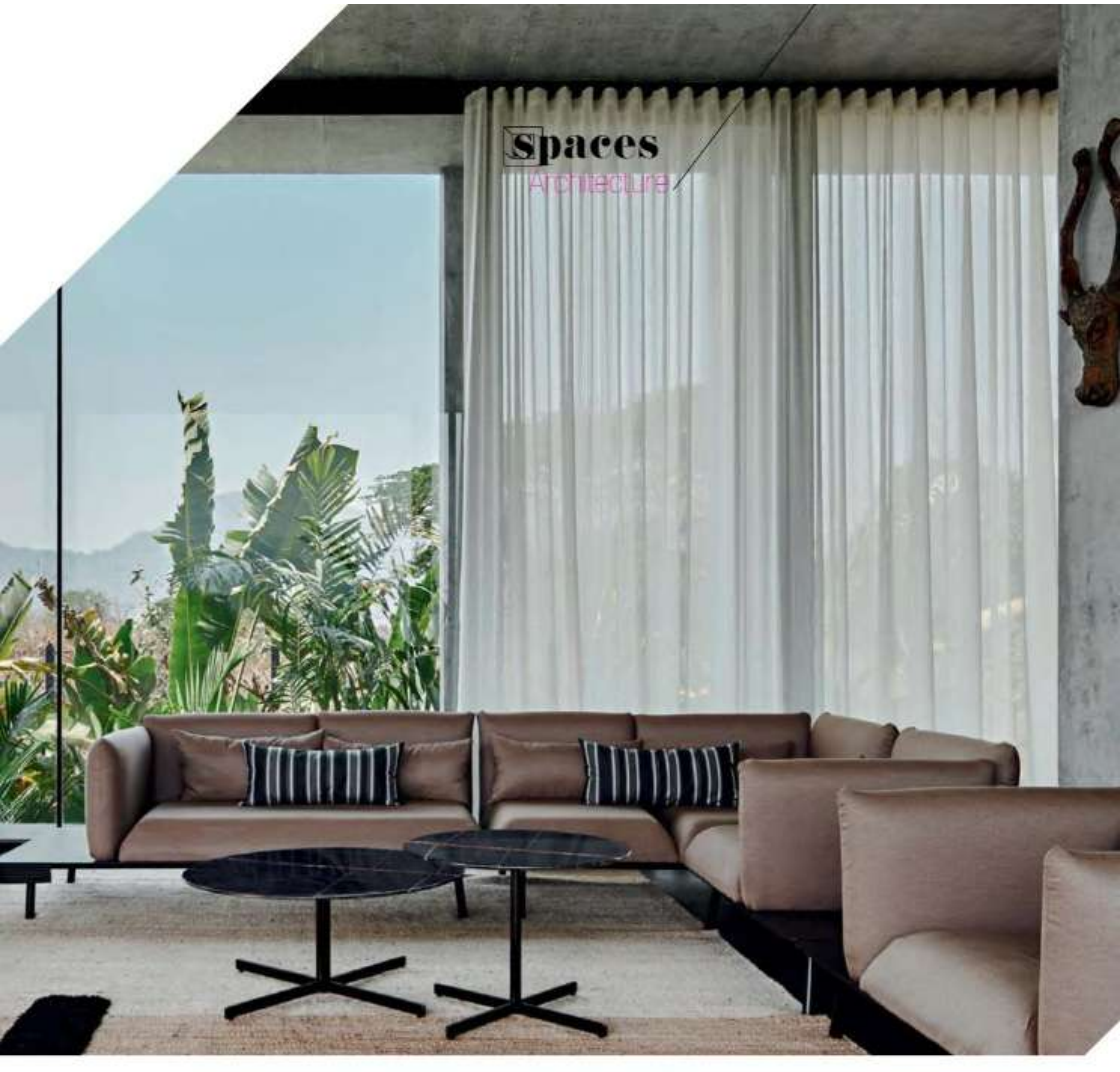
Kayzad Rumy Shroff and Maria Isabel Jimenez Leon

ACE OF SPACE
The architecture of the 2BHK has been intentionally designed to blend into the surroundings (below); a marble dining table set against a wooden backdrop creates an alluring visual

Photographs by SULEIMAN MERCHANT

Deep within the untamed wilderness of Karjat, stands a symbol of refuge on a tranquil 3.5 acres of farmland. Moulded as a monolithic mass of architecture, a building docks itself in liquid stone as an escape from the rigour of city life. The built form mimics the natural rusticity of its surroundings by standing bare against the sun to weather gracefully, as it was crafted to do so. It is in this state of solitude and ageing character that the farmhouse becomes second home to a family eagerly in search of a change in pace, far from any vestige of civilisation.

In response to the pre-existing thriving farmland, the anatomy of the two-BHK architecture choreographs itself respectfully to blend in rather than to stand out. Its insatiable appetite to be one with nature nudges the structure to drop anchor at the highest point within the farmscape, and with good



VIEW FINDER
In the living room large floor to ceiling windows blur the boundaries of the inside and outside (above); different angles of the facade of the home (next page and left)

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reason. To frame and capture as much of the sceneries as possible, from where they are most plentifully served. If it is not the hills in the distance, it is the cascading waterfall nearby; or sometimes the fruits of mango tree plantations, paddy fields and vegetable patches seem more attractive to seize.

An exterior concrete shell frames these vantages, comprising structural slabs and columns. Beyond this shell lies the heart of the edifice that is safeguarded, protecting life as it may playout for the household. A peripheral veil of glass facades and columns are the only elements that come between man and nature. A portico sandwiched in between glass and column creates an idyllic cue for man to try and engage with nature. By pitching an infinity pool along the portico edge, this cue only strengthens.

The slow pace of farm life dawns through the glass facades as the sun's rays generously pierce into the central living-dining core at rise and set, giving it a dynamic energy of life. Instilling a town square-like vibe, this communal space serves as a perfect spot for social gatherings. Away from the communal, privacy awaits at the east and west wings flanked on either side. Each wing accommodates a bed and bath suite and idyllically feels part of the landscape as its glass walls dissolve into the sceneries.

Minimalism is the protagonist of the building's design narration. An inkling of material exploration only begins to manifest at the habitable spaces, where textures primarily dress horizontal plains in concrete and stone. A larger bulk of vertical surfaces comprises glass screens that choose to render themselves with the all-encompassing sceneries that become part of the interior decor. A hint of opaque verticals breaks the transparency of the built, in an accented tone of natural stone walls.

The floating edifice, retires by night only to the whistle of crickets and the sonic backdrop of the Ulhas River nearby, perfectly defeating the visceral distractions and strictures of city life.

FACT FILE

Project Name: **MIRADOR**
Location: **Karjat, Maharashtra**
Size: **3,450 sq ft**
Lead Architects: **Kayzad Rumy Shroff and Maria Isabel Jimenez Leon**
Firm's Name: **SHROFFLEoN**

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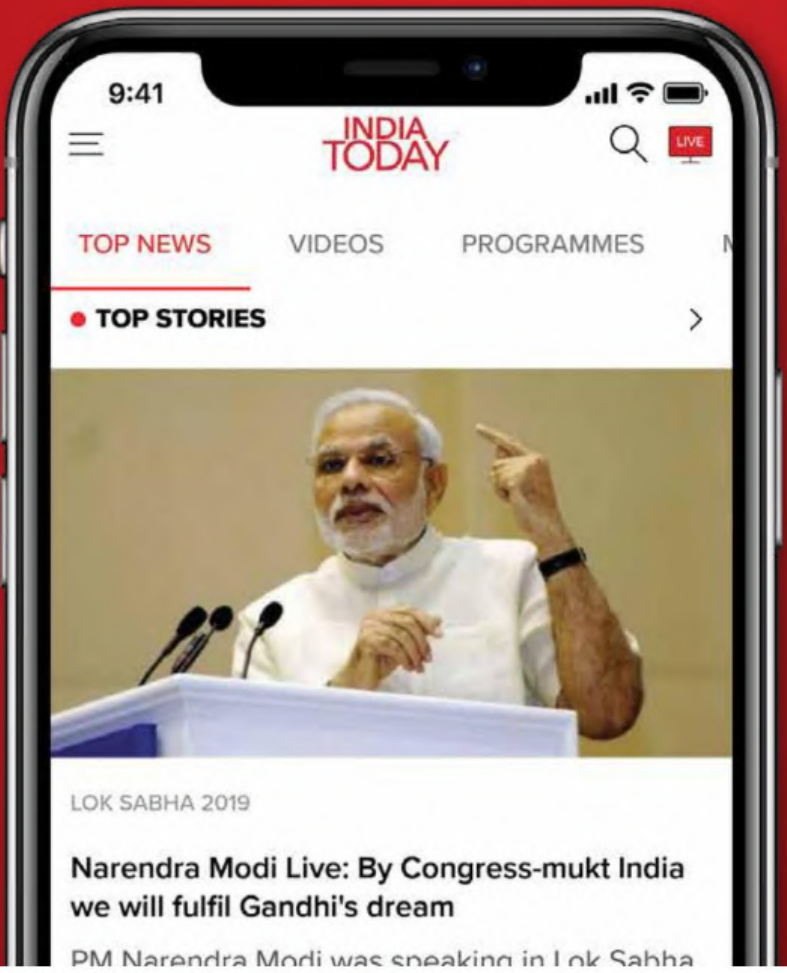

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